

**STREAMING** OUR HARDCORE ASSESSMENT  
OF MAINSTREAM MEDIA

**FREE-SYNC** IS THE NEW SCREEN TECHNOLOGY  
ALL IT'S CRACKED UP TO BE?



AUS **SALIS** #1 PC GAMING MAG

# PC PowerPlay

**READER'S  
GAME OF THE YEAR**

YOU VOTED, NOW  
DISCOVER YOUR  
FAVOURITE GAMES  
OF 2014!

## STARCRRAFT II: LEGACY OF THE VOID

THE PROTOSS BRING AN END TO THE **STARCRRAFT II** SAGA



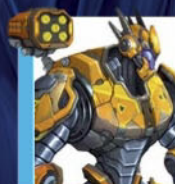
### **HARDLINE BATTLEFIELD**

DITCHES SOLDIERS  
FOR COPS AND  
ROBBERS



### **ROUTERS**

GET THE MOST  
OUT OF **YOUR  
CONNECTION** WITH  
OUR ROUNDUP



### **SERVO**

LOOT BASED MECH  
RTS ACTION FROM  
THE MAKERS OF  
**AGE OF EMPIRES!**



A Must See Next Generation RPG | **GAMEINFORMER**

**OVER 200  
AWARDS**



 **XBOX ONE**

**PC DVD-ROM**

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# THE WITCHER® WILD HUNT

THIS WORLD DOESN'T NEED A HERO.  
**IT NEEDS A PROFESSIONAL.**

**MAY 19, 2015**



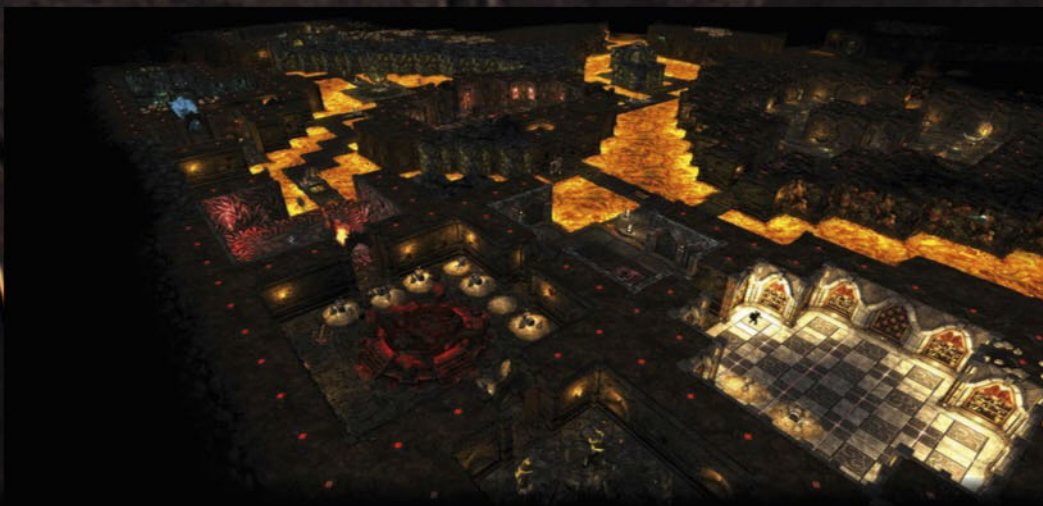
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and violence, Online  
interactivity

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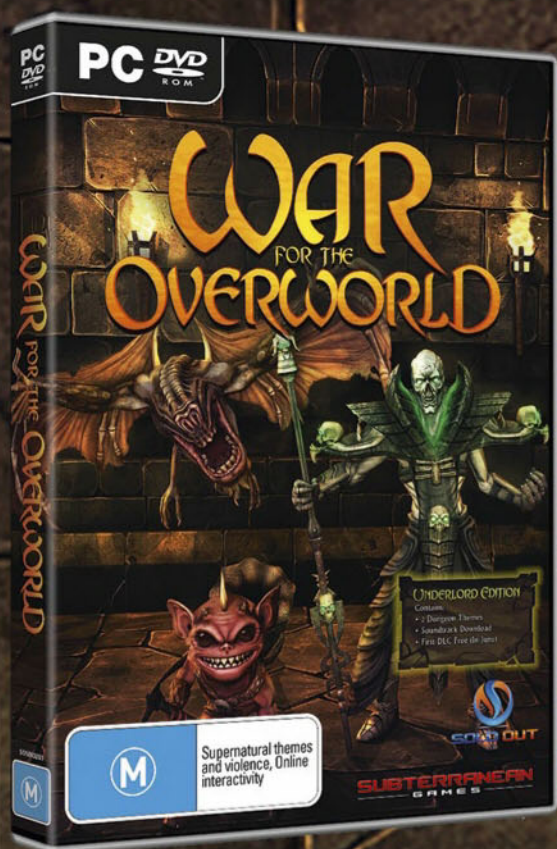
# WAR FOR THE OVERWORLD

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-Big Red Barrel"

**PC**  
DVD-ROM  
SOFTWARE

**SUBTERRANEAN**  
GAMES

  
**SOLD OUT**



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The final instalment of StarCraft II finally sees the Protoss build enough pylons







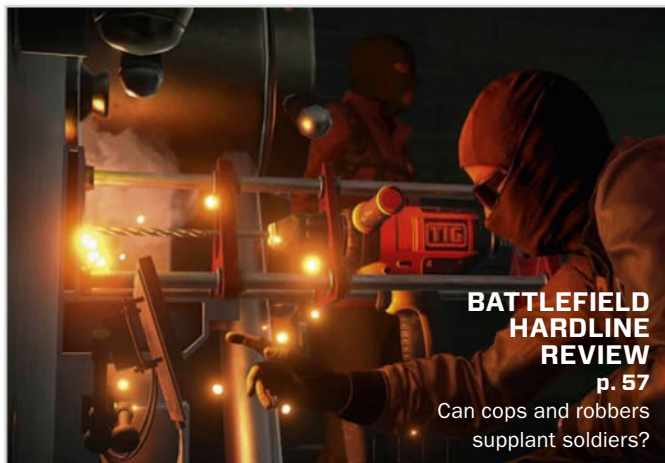
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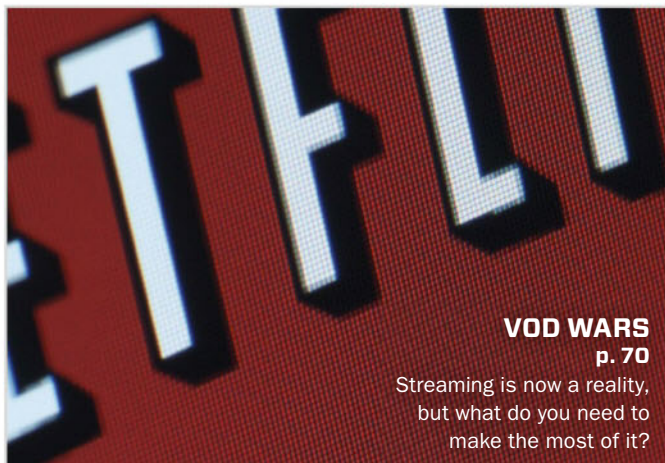
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# 28 MORE SLEEPS

Issue #239. Next issue we celebrate being in print for 20 years - quite a feat for any magazine but especially one that is focussed on PC gaming and tech. It has been quite a month when it comes to technology. Streaming services have finally found footing in the Australian market and, to everyone's surprise, the local service, Stan, currently has a better catalogue and offers more bang for your buck than the grand poobah of streaming services, Netflix. That, of course, will change in coming months as Netflix increases their catalogue. It's a good time to have an internet connection and be looking for entertainment.

On the other end of the scale there's the recent landmark court case between the producers of The Dallas Buyer's Club and iiNet, with the court ruling that the ISP (and other ISPs named in the case) must turn over the records of all those users who illegally downloaded the film. If you didn't download the movie there's no need to immediately worry, but this case has set a precedent that can and will be used in the future when it comes to copyright cases. The proposed "Three Strikes" copyright legislation has also just been published. If it goes through it won't be such a good time to have an internet connection and be looking for entertainment. The current legislation and court case seem to be solely focussed on film and music but it will be interesting to see if and how games piracy will be handled in the future.

On a more positive note, this month saw the podcasting microphones arrive in the office so we're flat out finalising the format for our upcoming monthly hour long talk-fest. We're still looking for a name so if you have any suggestions let us know. We also snagged ourselves a new rig for the games room courtesy of the good folks at Alienware, so that's pretty exciting as well.

On the gaming and tech front, it's reaching that interesting time of the year when everyone starts holding their breath for the announcements and reveals that will drop first at Computex, then a few weeks later at E3. While information about upcoming indie titles still comes thick and strong, the larger titles are remaining mostly silent, with the developers and distributors going into pre-E3 crunch to make sure what they are showing is the best it can be. It should be a big year for both Computex and E3 - new chip and motherboard architecture will mean a stack of new products and form factors at Computex and the fact that Bethesda is going to have their very first keynote presentation at E3 all but guarantees there are going to be at least a few really wonderful reveals. I doubt it's going to be Fallout 4, but I'm still keeping at least one pair of digits crossed just in case.

Enjoy the issue - we have a little something for everyone, from routers through to the best GDC had to offer in terms of games. We also have the results of your votes for the Reader's Game of the Year for 2014. It was enlightening to put together.

**Daniel Wilks**  
Editor  
[@drwilkenstein](mailto:drwilkenstein)

## QUOTES OF THE MONTH

"I am seething with racing rage"

"If you need me, I'll be in a food coma"

"It won't work, the nubbin has broken off"

## PC PowerPlay

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## THIS MONTH...



**DANIEL WILKS**  
Shaved (once)  
[@drwilkenstein](#)



**MALCOLM CAMPBELL**  
Played Bloodborne



**BENNETT RING**  
Bought a ticket to ride  
[@bennettring](#)



**JAMES COTTEE**  
Fought for robot rights  
[@j\\_cottee](#)



**MEGHANN O'NEILL**  
Became afraid of the dark  
[@firkraags](#)



**DAVE KOZICKI**  
Played cops and robbers



**BEN MANSILL**  
Lost a race



**ROBERT NORTH**  
Left our warm embrace



**ANGUS BAILLIE**  
Was unusually quiet



**ALESSANDRO GUARRERA**  
Started interning  
[@ALguarrera](#)



**DAVID HOLLINGWORTH**  
Was on a boat, man



**CAMERON FERRIS**  
Ate lots of jelly  
[@pcpowerplay](#)

# FRONTEND



## 42 Starcraft 2: Legacy of the Void

The Protoss finally arrive



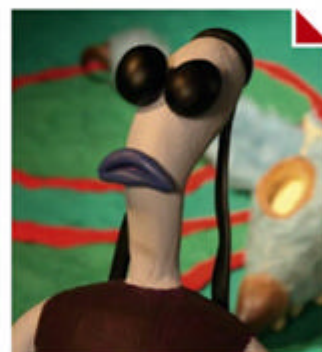
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Giant robots with modular bodies



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We round up the best



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# THE RELEASE SCHEDULE

Looking ahead to the upcoming PC game releases

LEGEND:



Steam



Origin



Good Old Games



uPlay



Download



Retail

## APRIL

2<sup>ND</sup>

**PROJECT CARS**  
SLIGHTLY MAD  
STUDIOS

7<sup>TH</sup>

**DARK SOULS II:  
SCHOLAR OF THE  
FIRST SIN**  
FROM SOFTWARE

9<sup>TH</sup>

**STAR DRIVE 2**  
ICEBERG  
INTERACTIVE

14<sup>TH</sup>

**MORTAL  
KOMBAT X**  
NETHERREALM  
STUDIOS

14<sup>TH</sup>

**GRAND THEFT  
AUTO V**  
ROCKSTAR



TBA



**GALACTIC  
CIVILIZATIONS  
III**  
STARDOCK



## MAY

15<sup>TH</sup>

**STARLIGHT  
DRIFTER**  
AJILLEY

19<sup>TH</sup>

**THE WITCHER 3:  
WILD HUNT**  
CD PROJEKT RED

26<sup>TH</sup>

**MAGICKA 2**  
PARADOX  
INTERACTIVE



## JUNE

3<sup>RD</sup>

**BATMAN:  
ARKHAM KNIGHT**  
ROCKSTEADY



TBA



**BLOOD BOWL 2**  
CYANIDE



TBA



**F1 2015**  
EA

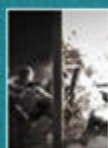


## 2015

TBA



**HYPER LIGHT  
DRIFTER**  
HEART MACHINE



**TOM CLANCY'S  
RAINBOW SIX:  
SIEGE**  
UBISOFT MONTREAL



SEPT



**ROCKET RANGER  
RELOADED**  
CINEMAWARE



SEPT



**METAL GEAR  
SOLID 5**  
KONAMI



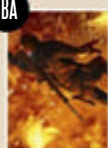
TBA



**DEAD ISLAND 2**  
YAGER  
DEVELOPMENT



TBA



**JUST CAUSE 3**  
AVALANCHE  
STUDIOS



TBA



**BATTLEBORN**  
GEARBOX  
SOFTWARE

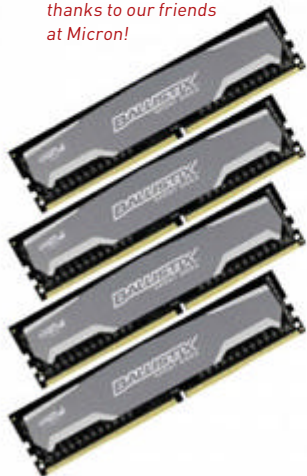






### LETTER OF THE MONTH WINS!

Write in to PCPP with your rants, considered opinions, and endless run-on sentences of pure awesome. The address is letters@pcpowerplay.com.au. Each letter read by hand! This Letter of the Month winner scores himself a Ballistix 16GB Kit (4GBx4) DDR4 kit, thanks to our friends at Micron!



## LETTER OF THE MONTH

### FRIENDLY CONVERSATION

I must admit, like most gaming nerds, I don't like change. And when the two writer reviews came in I didn't think I would like them. But they have won me over, they read like a pod cast and getting more than one view on a game is incredibly helpful. PC Powerplay is an important part of my gaming news gathering and now that you are moving into more online media I think it's a wonderful thing. Podcasts and Lets Plays in Australian accents will be a welcome addition to the internet as there aren't enough out there. The print media landscape is of course changing and until recently PC Powerplay was the only place I got my PC gaming news. But gaming podcasts have crept in, and lets plays and following the folks at your fine publication on twitter. But in spite of this, I cherish the reviews I get in print from you, I find myself more likely to read a long article if it isn't on a screen in front of me. And the one page point of view articles by your various writers (especially Meghann O'Neills) are fantastic. You'll have a subscriber in me as long as you are around, in whatever form that ultimately takes.

Keep up the good work!

**David Kimber**

Hi David - We're big believers in having a uniquely Australian voice in the magazine and soon in the podcast as well. Our microphones have arrived and the plans have been firmed up for the first episode.

### OPINIONS

“Basically, Dying Light is a Bad Game TM”. This was one of the first quotes that jumped out at me upon reading this review.

Then at the end of this and I will call it loosely, review, a score of 4/10. What total and utter rubbish!

I have run this score past a few of my friends, who like I, are thoroughly enjoying the hell out of this game. We are all mystified.

Did Joab forget to have his coffee that morning? Catch the wrong train to work?

Either that or he does not enjoy this game type and you probably should have had somebody else write the review.

The fact that this review got past the editor and was printed is an even greater travesty.

Now for years I have gauged a games worthiness to buy, by the scores your reviews provide, not entirely but for lesser known titles that I am on the fence about, Yes!

Luckily I had pre-ordered this game and some 70+ hrs later, I am still thoroughly enjoying.

Techland have done a magnificent job with this game,

adding elements of Assassin's Creed type map exploration style with the 'parkour'.

Subtle hints of Far Cry, Skyrim gameplay thrown in. Graphics are stunning and thus far, I have only found one glitch.

Climbing a tower, I found myself under the map swimming ... quite puzzling but perfectly understandable on a map this size and complex.

Anyone who did not buy this game solely on the review yielding a 4/10, reconsider.

Giving this game a score of anything less than 8/10, would be an injustice. I personally would rate it at 9/10 !

Sincerely Yours

**Puzzled PCPP reader aka Mark**

Hi Mark - A review is a subjective thing. Joab generally loves action games in the vein of Dying Light, but he didn't like this one. To him a score of four is appropriate but to you a score at least double that is all that will do. People are free to like or dislike any game, regardless of score.

## FEEDBACK #238

> **Matthew Schmidt:** I stared at the cover for ten minutes before realising it wasn't a mirror. Good issue. Great article at the back about how... passionate fans can be.

> **wokeye27:** Great edition - budget cases was great... but are the two high scorers better than the Bitfenix Shinobi? Very keen for Witcher 3!

> **Drav:** I really enjoyed this issue, perhaps more than any I've read so far (I started with #200). Great work.

> **Deathboy101:** Got mine today, I can never guess the timing these days, the posties must be having a read before riding them around. Loving the back cover.

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## BOXIAO (BEN) AGE 35 | PERTH, WA

This month's MY PC  
brought to you by



### FOUR MOST IMPRESSIVE FEATURES:

1. XFX R9295X2 GPU
2. Corsair AX1500i PSU
3. Epson EH-TW9200W Projector with 100" screen
4. Logitech G27 Racing Wheel with Playseat

**LAST UPGRADE:** An entire new gaming rig (i7-4790k CPU, ASUS Maximus VII Ranger MOBO, Corsair AX1500i PSU, Corsair H105 Cooler, XFX R9 295X2 GPU, G.skill 32GB Trident X 2400Mhz RAM, Samsung 850 EVO 1TB solid state HDD, Western Digital Black 4TB HDD, Corsair 780T case, Pioneer Blu-ray writer)

**DREAM UPGRADE:** Another R9 295X2 with a freesync monitor or a Corsair K95 keyboard as my 5 years old Razer keyboard has seen better days.

**FAVOURITE FEATURE:** XFX R9 295X2 and Corsair AX1500i

### BEN WINS!

Thanks to the good people at Corsair, Ben gets his wish and wins a shiny new K95 keyboard!



**WHY SO SPECIAL?:** I have been planning to build a new gaming rig to replace my 5 years old rig for over a year, but couldn't decide on the GPU. I don't get into this whole fan boy thing of Nvidia vs AMD. It has always been whichever company can provide me with the best product at the right price. Your review of the R9 295X2 in issue 228 and the recent price drop on the GPU has finally sealed the deal for me. I also carefully handpicked all other components after the yearlong research (mainly through PCPP).

1. We're jealous of this setup
2. Seriously jealous
3. Now you're just being mean
4. Coolest den lighting ever
5. That's just showing off
6. Pretty sweet PC too

### WANT FREE STUFF?

Send your MyPC entry today to [mypc@pcpowerplay.com.au](mailto:mypc@pcpowerplay.com.au). Include the four most impressive elements of its hardware, your last upgrade, your dream upgrade, your favourite feature and what you think makes your PC special. Make sure to include your name, age and location. And last but not least, attach a 5MP or bigger image of your PC! No camera phone shots, and make sure it's in focus!



# PCPP GAME & TECH NEWS

## Blood, vomiting, new factions in Total War: Attila DLC

Bringing new levels of gory authenticity to the fall of the Roman Empire.

**T**otal War: Attila has received a brand new DLC dubbed Blood & Burning that transforms the strategy title into a spectacle of – you guessed it – blood and burning.

Comparable to Rome II's Blood & Gore DLC and Shogun 2's Blood Pack DLC, Blood & Burning adds blood effects, decapitations, limb dismemberment, disembowelment, and vomiting troops to make Total War: Attila the videogame equivalent of an HBO drama, even if without the gratuitous sex scenes and female nudity.

However, though it will only set you back a few dollars, many Steam users have been quick to criticise the lack of new animations and questioned why this wasn't included in the



original release or provided free of charge.

There's also another DLC pack for players keen on more content which has received a much more positive reception on Steam. The Celts Culture Pack features campaigns including the Ebdanians (who inhabited ancient Ireland), and the Caledonians and Picts (both of whom lived in ancient Scotland).

Both packs are available now for purchase via Steam.

## Cougar launches new 300M gaming mouse

Targeted at 'mainstream pro-level' gamers.

**I**f you're in the market for a new mouse with a gaming focus, and are looking for something with a bit more colour than the blacks and greys that dominate this part of the peripherals space, you may be really excited by Cougar's latest offering. The company's just announced the 300M gaming mouse, a peripheral it claims is aimed at 'mainstream pro-level' gamers.

Whatever that is.

But the mouse, on paper, looks pretty good. The 300M boasts

seven programmable buttons, and it looks like it might even be good for left-handed gamers. It also has a 4000 DPI optical sensor, backed by a 1000Hz polling rate and 1ms response time, so it should be fast and accurate. Omron switches in the main mouse buttons promise a lifespan of 5 million clicks.

That's a lot of dead things in Diablo!

The 300M also has onboard memory and three configuration profiles, and DPI LEDs that can display 16.8 million colours. Cougar claims this let's immediately identify whatever mode you're using, but if that were all, it would only need three colours - but we'll allow it that flourish.

The mouse will be available next month, for a fairly reasonable \$US39.99.



## Asteroids: Outpost goes into Early Access

Asteroids is back, but not as we know it.

**I**n a move that sounds a lot like a satire of modern gaming, Atari have announced that the 70s arcade classic Asteroids will be getting a gritty reboot as a first-person, survival, space sim MMO. Asteroids: Outpost will grant players control of a deep-space miner - who must extract minerals, build bases, and defend against incoming asteroid showers and hostile claim jumpers. All the bases in the game are susceptible to looting, which means players must do their best to both defend their own resources whilst seeking out the bases of other players in order to lay claim to theirs.

The game will also feature a weapon and equipment crafting system for

upgrading and creating new gear. This system will utilize both the precious resources mined by the player as well as the technology they have available at their base. In-game space suits and vehicles will also give players the freedom to traverse the terrain of the vast interstellar, terrestrial landscapes – complete with plenty of craters, boulders, cliffs and valleys, crystal formations, lava flows, gas plumes and other intriguing geological features.

Asteroids: Outpost is in Early Access and out now on Steam. To mark the original release of Asteroids in 1979, Asteroids: Outpost is currently available on Steam at the 34% discounted price of \$19.79 US until the 2nd April.







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# PCPP GAME & TECH NEWS

## MSI reveals a whole range of gaming hardware

MSI drops a tonne of new gear on the gaming market.

**M**SI used to be the third kid on the block row of the bus, hanging out with the big kids ASUS and GIGABYTE - but the company's put in some hard yards and has been producing some really solid gear.

Like GIGABYTE last week, MSI's got four new motherboards on the horizon, but they're all gaming focused: the Z97A GAMING 9 ACK, Z97A GAMING 7, X99A GAMING 9 ACK and the X99A GAMING 7. They all feature USB 3.1 and support all of Intel's upcoming fifth-gen processors.

The Z97A GAMING 6 goes one step further, with a type-C USB 3.1 port, in case you can never get your USB devices plugged in right first time, which I'm sure is really handy for some people.

The boards do look good, in this year's gaming colours of black and red, but more interesting is MSI's range of dedicated all-in-one gaming PCs. All-in-ones are nothing really new, but they're usually pitched as lifestyle

devices, for the kitchen or lounge room, or as perfect front-of-office machines.

The AG270 2QC 3K (rolls off the tongue!) features a 27in, 2560 x 1440 display, backed by a Core i7 CPU, and a mobile GTX 970M processor. With advances in mobile graphics in recent years, it should be quite the tidy performer, though still behind dedicated desktop units.

The 24GE, set for release later this year, ups the display to a 4K model.

And, taking a leaf out of ASUS' book, MSI also has a premium SLI bridge on the market, though it's limited to a single two-way bridge, with single-slot spacing. It's got fancy lights and is designed for MSI's Twin Frozr ("The Frozr, is also cursed!") cards, and the MSI Gaming App.

We'll hopefully get the full range of new gear to look at shortly.



## Elder Scrolls Online transitions to Tamriel Unlimited

The game still costs, but it is free to play.

**F**rom my own personal experience, The Elder Scrolls Online was a bit of a mixed bag of an MMO. It had some good stuff, it had some bad stuff, and my girlfriend and I stopped playing after about a month. It seems that this is bit of a common experience, and it seems that kind of player is exactly who Bethesda's hoping will come back for The Elder Scrolls Online: Tamriel Unlimited.

The new iteration of the game is basically the complete edition - the whole original game, all major expansions. It's currently about seventy bucks on Steam, but has a free-subscription model.

For those wanting something more, there is a Premium Membership, and an in-game store for buying certain items and boosts.





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# 50%, FREE

Sit back, do nothing, engage hyperspeed

Our PC gaming is about to receive a free arse-rocket, the likes of which haven't been seen since the late 1990s. I'm talking about DirectX 12, and side by side with that, Vulkan. Both are low level APIs – the cogs in the machine at the most basic level – the graphics processing machinery upon which all other APIs and graphics engines sit and do their thing.

Until now, a new DirectX has generally meant a small handful of new tools for the developers to pretty things up with, a bit of a boost in FPS in the order of 10-15%, and support for things that don't matter to us in gaming, like GPGPU support in DX11. Now, though, early hype has been backed up by some pretty amazing numbers. An update to 3DMark has allowed a basic synthetic test based on how many Draw Calls can be made using DX12. Now, this won't equate to the same gains in FPS, but it's a critical part of the graphics pipeline, and what we're seeing is an order of magnitude improvement over DirectX 11.

## MAGNITUDINAL

For those of us who have long forgotten what an order of magnitude actually is, precisely, it's not just 'really big', it's 10x. In the case of the Draw Call results for DX12, it's actually closer to 20x, and that certainly is really big. In terms of actual FPS gains over DX11 at the end of the day, estimates of around 50% abound! And those are said to be conservative...

It's at times like this that we go to high hype alert. We have been lifted high and dropped hard before, so as much as the temptation exists to give in to the promise completely and enjoy unrestrained excitement, we must still be cautious. I, for one, am cautiously hyper-excited.

DX 12 games should start appearing by the end of the year, but don't expect a quick flood. That said, there's no mistaking just how big this will be. The big unknown for now is how this affects our existing hardware, and the next generation of graphics cards. It's likely you will have to upgrade, but for a leap this massive the next generation of video cards will be must-have items.

One easy known is the need for Windows 10. DirectX12 won't be supported (at this stage) for lower operating systems, but as we all know Win 10 will be free so there's no headache in that department.

## VULKANISATION

A low-level API offering almost identical performance is, in fact, already with us. AMD's Mantle (when it was known as such) is, for all intents, identical in function and benefit. But apart from Thief, there's really nothing to play and see the gains. Some big stuff is coming, most notably Star Citizen, but the scant Mantle support should in no way be taken to mean that platform is a flop – far from it.

Mantle, by that name at least, is no more. After lobbying from AMD, Mantle has been adopted as the standard graphics API for OpenGL, and Open GL is now known as Vulkan.

## POLITICING

That opens a great many doors, as well as creating what will be a very interesting battleground as we go into 2016, and beyond. Fuelling most of that fire will be Steam OS, and its spin-off hardware, the SteamBox. That Linux-based platform is primed for Vulkan, so if Valve manage to deliver on the threat to

take on, and defeat Windows – and hence, DirectX – as the dominant gaming OS of the future, then we still win.

Was DirectX 12's low-level API performance given any sort of impetus by Mantle's unexpected and miraculous performance? Microsoft say no, and that DirectX 12 has been in development for several years. There's no reason not to believe that. You don't just magic up a 50% gain in a few short months because a lowly competitor with a tiny fraction of your market share has done a good job.

But hells bells are we in for a mighty surge. Think beyond a mere order of magnitude

jump in frames, and speculate a little further than being able to crank up detail to ultra, or maybe add another couple of screens to your rig. All good things! But the probability

“We must still be cautious. I, for one, am cautiously hyper-excited”

is that as devs get their heads around the capabilities of both Vulkan and DX 12 they'll gobble up much of the performance dividend first by working more complex geometry, textures, and effects into their games.

A possible sticking point will be games that originate on consoles, which is AMD territory. For ported titles we may still see some limitations at play, but that will be centred around system and video memory, as usual. I prefer to look outwards at PC devs and PC-specific titles. It can't be bad news whichever way it falls. We're on the cusp of a momentous shift up in what our hardware can do, and with that, unbelievable games in the years ahead. 🚀



**BEN MANSILL** is a low-level API.





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## Grand Theft Auto V

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By the time you're going to be reading this, GTA V will have finally arrived on PC, but how could we resist posting a screenshot as beautiful as this? GTA V is one of the best looking games we've seen on PC, and for fans of the previous games, the first person mode is an absolute revelation. It changes everything.





# THE IMPOSTOR SYNDROME

Sure, Sid Meier's Starships was a letdown. But it may yet hold the secret for saving gaming from itself...

Luc Besson recently released a motion picture with a far-fetched, yet eerily plausible premise: that Scarlett Johansson only uses 10% of her brain. Should the full power of her latent mind-flesh be unleashed, what might she accomplish? Would we even recognise her as human? Would her new ability to show emotions render her typecast, forcing Marvel Studios to cast a new Black Widow? These dank, dark questions still hung in the air as GDC rolled around this year, when Ashes of the Singularity showed off the potential of DirectX 12. The PR line went a little something like this: today's unwitting gamers are only using 10% of their computers raw power, and those who upgrade to Windows 10 will bear witness to battling cyber-armies on a scale that will make Total Annihilation look like Noughts and Crosses.

Moore's Law is still on the books, and unlikely to be revoked this side of 2020, but it would be a tragic waste of resources if this mega-spurt of new CPU power was squandered on merely making our games prettier. The great Sid Meier defines a game as "a series of interesting choices," and one imagines that it will be difficult to choose a salient option when your armies of hover-ships and mega-tanks are so granulated and numerous that it's difficult to perceive them as anything other than a violent, metallic gas.

Meier himself made an interesting choice recently when he nerfed the graphics options on his ripping new 4x/tactical hybrid Sid Meier's Starships. This in turn presented potential players with some perplexing meta-choices before they even bought the game. What platform should I buy it on to ensure maximal legibility of the teeny tiny text? Should I buy now, or gamble that 2K will get around to fixing the crash-to-desktop bug in

the next few months? Does my old 3.5 inch floppy of SSG's Reach For The Stars still work? Sid Meier's new foray into meta-gaming has captured the imaginations of strategy wonks worldwide, and we applaud his efforts.

He's demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that graphical fidelity alone is not the final frontier for gaming innovation. So what is? For a possible answer we should recall the motto of the Sirius Cybernetics Corporation: 'Share and Enjoy.' Only a selfish bitlord would hog all that computing power for himself – far better to donate it to The Greater Good.

Distributed processing has already been put to good use with the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence, which anyone

**“if these cyber-chokos are a little too easy to kill, where's the harm?”**


with clock cycles to spare can contribute to via SETI@home. Likewise, Folding@home is fighting the good fight against neurodegenerative disorders and cancer. NASA recently released the Asteroid Data Hunter; volunteers can now join forces to detect ELE doom rocks and line up juicy nuggets for asteroid miners.

But why stop there? Distributed processing could conceivably be tapped to solve the two biggest problems plaguing otherwise halfway decent online games. The first is poor monetisation. Developers not big enough to hire in-house economists have made many a well-meaning, ham-fisted business decision that has cratered their finances. But what if players agreed to lend all their spare computing power to mining Bitcoins? Or Dogecoins, or whatever the crypto-currency

du jour is by the time this column sees print. If the graphical load of such a game was on a par with, say, Sid Meier's Starships, then this could well be a viable business model.

The second seemingly insoluble problem: a lack of warm bodies. Every new release, re-release, and re-master divides the market, and if there isn't a critical mass of players then even a world-beating game like World of Tanks can get bogged down when launching a new game mode. Historical Battles seemed like a good idea at the time, but once the novelty wore off even the most dedicated war nerds lost hope as the match-maker failed to wrangle enough players for a game, timing out again and again. The solution: bots.

Robots have a bad reputation in games, but they perform so many vital duties in the wider world. They drop bombs on our enemies, assemble our cars, and host our TV programs. They buoy the bubble economies of Facebook and Twitter, and with declining education standards worldwide it's only a matter of time before a new generation of AI serfs outmatches the bottom-percentile scrublords.

Just think of a bot as a cybernetic choko. That horrid vegetable is disgusting by itself, but as a secret ingredient it can pad out any apple pie. And if these cyber-chokos are a little too easy to kill, where's the harm? Why not let gamers feel good about themselves for a change? There's already a multiverse of methods for inducing depression – like reading the Steam user reviews of Sid Meier's Starships... 



**JAMES COTTEE** discloses that he plays a robot on TV so his views of robots may be biased.





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# IT KEEPS HAPPENING

WHO JESS HASKINS  
WHERE WHAT PUMPKIN STUDIOS  
WHY HIVESWAP



One of the most successful games ever launched on Kickstarter, Hiveswap will soon let MS Paint Adventures fans delve into the primordial pre-history of a cult hit web-comic. We recently chatted with What Pumpkin Studios creative director **JESS HASKINS**, who was more than happy to tell us about Homestuck...

For those on the outside looking in, Homestuck fandom is baffling. A web comic with flash games in it? Alien internet trolls based on zodiac signs? Endless references to Con Air? Even Jess Haskins, creative director of its long-awaited video game spin off, struggles to nail down the core of Homestuck's appeal. "Man, that is, that is a big question. I think part of it is that it's such a big and expansive world and has all these wonderful casts of characters. It's a world that's actually really easy to put yourself in to. Because it has its own lingo, it has a lot of stuff about how characters have their powers, and their quirks, and their personality, and their look. It's really easy to immerse yourself in that world, and see yourself, in that. So making a game where players can actually be in the world, instead of just reading about all these characters, is a natural next step for the brand."

Homestuck creator Andrew Hussie has been involved in every aspect of the writing and production, from the outline level all the way down to the final text and finishing touches; yet it's been a highly collaborative process. "He's open to really good ideas, and mostly

really funny jokes, wherever we can get them. So if you throw something in that makes Andrew laugh, then it's in."

Hiveswap is being developed in Unity, and the production process has been surprisingly fast. "The game has been in pre-production for quite a while. Working on the script and the story at a really high level. It was back in October when we actually started up the studio here in New York, and really

releasing it in four acts, which will be evenly spaced. This isn't: 'Oh crap, we only have money to make a quarter of the game! Let's raise some more!' We feel that the game is better enjoyed and digested in chunks, sort of like the comic itself, which has a big rush of content, and then a long pause, while the audience can read, absorb, speculate, theorise, tear it apart, dig in, and then anticipate the next instalment.

"So it's really a creative decision, to break it up that way. But we're completely confident with the budget, with our progress, and we're not looking to pull a... no, I don't even want to say, 'Pull a Double Fine.' They're doing great over there. Their game looks great. It's just taking a little bit longer than

Hiveswap takes this ball and runs with it. "It definitely has the spirit of the comic. Which, in a lot of ways, is about highlighting, lampshading some of the possibly absurd or quirky mechanical conventions of games. Things like the inventory: this magical space where you can store living things, and a car, and just whip them out at will. It's not just abstracted, it's a physical reality for these kids. Poking fun at the idea of 'achievement' and 'level progression' and ladders and rewards, and all of these things that are weird and gamey. The game is a natural place to explore and play with these things. We definitely are carrying on that tradition."

A great deal of the comics humour stemmed from the its characters' Kafkaesque struggles to manage their inventories, but Jess's team decided early on that directly emulating this would be a fool's errand. "We don't want any of our jokes to compromise or get in the way of user experience. Reading about John having terrible trouble with his Sylladex and flinging his objects across the room is funny to read about, but not so fun as a player if you're actually doing that. In that sense, we have toned it down."

Three main playable characters will star in Act 1, with two more to appear down the track. "That main one that you've probably seen and met so far is Joey Claire, who is our star of the story. Plucky 90s kid. Her interests include dance and veterinary science, and solving puzzles. There is her dorky kid

## “A web comic with flash games in it? Alien internet trolls based on zodiac signs?”

got the team together to dive into production. Since then we've been tearing through it at a really fast clip. It's been really nice to see everything come together after it's been gestating for all this time."

The game is due to launch a full year after the date in the initial Kickstarter pitch, but Jess assured us that the project is otherwise running smoothly, and that its episodic structure is no cause for alarm.

"One: We are not running out of money. We are not splitting the game in two. The game is planned to be episodic. We're

they thought, because game dev is hard. We realise this, and we're trying to go forward while being aware of this."

And the backers? "I think they generally have been pretty understanding. There are always people who aren't going to be 100% satisfied, but I haven't been made aware of any mobs with pitchforks. Mostly, I've just seen a lot of enthusiasm and excitement about the game."

Not entirely unlike Scott Pilgrim, the Homestuck comic is a world where our reality and video game logic are blurred together in a surreal melange.



brother Jude Harley, who is a bit of a conspiracy buff, and has a suite of trained carrier pigeons that do his bidding. And then, later on, we will meet Xefros Tritoh, who is the first Troll that Joey meets. And he has many interests including telekinesis, butling, and the Troll sport of 'Arena Stickball.'

Wait a minute... 'butling'?

"Butling. The art of being a butler."

21st century internet shenanigans abound in Homestuck, But Joey starts her adventure in 1994, so when she's whisked through time and space to the Troll World, discovering social media apps like 'Prongle' gives her a profound case of culture shock. "In this weird alien sci-fi setting, what they have is like our modern internet. So it's like a 90s kid being thrown into the present day. And discovering social media! And online shopping! And selfies! And all this stuff that to her is completely foreign stuff, but to the modern player, it's like seeing her grapple with present day internet." Its wonders and its horrors? "In equal measure."

Assembled from .gifs and rambling chat logs between 20+ main characters, Homestuck is unusual in that follows a creation myth-style story structure. The game will be diverging from this format. "Hiveswap is more of a classic Hero's Journey. Obviously, a kind of classic adventure story. It's a quest, basically. And instead of one, singular hero, it's a group of people who each take their turn in the spotlight, and have to work together and cooperate. There's a big doomsday end-of-the-world McGuffin, and there's a big evil villain. In those terms, I'd say it's a bit more of a classic, tighter story than a sprawling creation myth."

Replete with weird worlds and zany characters, Hiveswap is being modelled on the LucasArts greats, though readers will be heartened to learn that some aspects of 90s adventure games will not be emulated. There won't be a

re-run of the infamous cat hair moustache puzzle from Gabriel Knight 3. "It's the parable of the off-the-rails-what-were-they-thinking-you'd-better-call-the-hint-line-buy-the-hint-book type of illogical puzzle design. Which reportedly killed adventure games. I'm certainly very aware of that whole tradition. I'm personally more in favour of the more logical, story-driven puzzles, rather than exercises in absurdity.

"Unless it's, you know, to make a point. As I said, Homestuck, and Hiveswap by extension, are about the absurdity of puzzles. But it's bad experience design to design something where you have to be in the brain of the designer to figure out what they possibly meant. We wouldn't go down that route."

Homestuck's wild ride has lasted for over five years now, but Jess hinted that Hiveswap could see the franchise live beyond the fated conclusion of Homestuck proper. "The game has a different set of characters, a different setting, and is meant to stand on its own. Not just for fans of the comic, but to bring other people into the world. But it's a fascinating, fun world, and there's plenty more to explore.

"If this first game, once it's out, it does well, we'd like to move on to do a second, companion game, also set in the world. And after that, there's really no limit to what we could do."

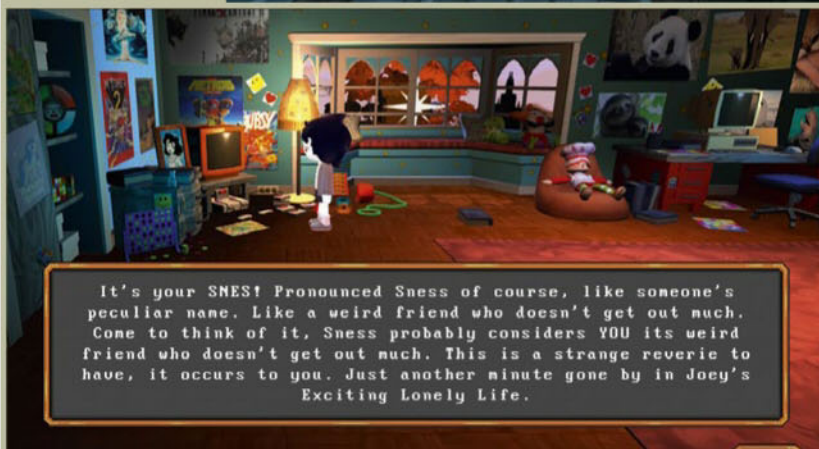
To wit: the abundance of matroska-like meta-humour will carry on from Homestuck into Hiveswap. "We're way into meta. As many levels of meta as we can get, we're in for that. [laughs] Rest assured!" Perhaps the most striking example of this in the source material is an ironically awful comic-within-a-comic. We had to know: Will Sweet Bro and Hella Jeff be in the game?

"[laughs] I don't know if I'm allowed to divulge such secrets!"

Hiveswap Act 1 is due to launch in Q2 2015. For more details, visit [Hiveswap.com](http://Hiveswap.com). **PC**



Nothing could ever go wrong in the mask attic



Popular Homestuck composers James Roach and Toby Fox have been tapped for the soundtrack.







## IT'S TELLING

To whom would you license your IP? To those who know best what to do with it.

After viewing the epic TV series, *Breaking Bad*, in its harrowing (but brilliant) entirety, I can't say I felt any lingering affection for Saul Goodman. He was a well written character, but sleazy and unlovable. Surprisingly, I'm enjoying the spinoff series immensely and, now, I just want to hug the guy. I didn't buy *Better Call Saul* with any kind of expectation. I just wanted more content, set in the same world. Oddly, it's the mums at school pick-up who I usually talk to about *Breaking Bad*. The demand for it endures.

The desire for "more of the similar," is also why I picked up Telltale's *Game of Thrones*. I've read the books and watched the show, but they are, largely, identical. It's fun seeing an actor portray Joffrey, but I know what is going to happen next. This Telltale take on the lore invites you back in, from multiple, new perspectives, including those of an exiled squire and a young lord. As a handmaiden in King's Landing, you are even privy to some of Margaery Tyrell's most personal thoughts.

The "parallel story" thing that Telltale do is just one element of a very successful formula. If you're familiar with *Game of Thrones*, you'll know that Cersei Lannister is terrifying. Now, in that Telltale way, push W to painstakingly walk towards her, to defend yourself against accusations of being a traitor to the King. I usually dislike "meaningless busy work" and QTEs, but from the first time I frantically kicked at a zombie's head, in *The Walking Dead*, I could appreciate the evocative potential.

The other benefit of the "light interactivity" Telltale is honing, in their narrative adventures, is that they don't have to cast characters as "the best swordsman in the land," or "the skilfullest stealth master," in order to engage the player. Scrambling for a

sword and a, D, D, S, QQQQQQQQQQQQ, E, oh no, Valar Morghulis, is plenty exciting, playing as a terrified squire. There are humorous moments, too, like trying to clink your ale glass with a friend and, upon missing, being accused of drunkenness.

The last time I wrote here about Telltale games, I was halfway through *The Walking Dead*, series 2 and worrying about the pregnant lady, as well as people breaking their glasses. I got a really bad ending alongside, thankfully, only 8% of other players. I made terrible, desperate choices that were silly, in retrospect. Although choice and consequence in *Game of Thrones* is still largely limited to details and illusion thus

**“Telltale Minecraft? I honestly can't picture how that's going to work”**

far, this setting is one in which we're used to genuine danger.

What happens if this person no longer wants to marry me? Did my insistence on a fair price lead to violence, or was it inevitable? Is the other handmaiden going to tell Cersei my secret plans? Which man is better equipped to be my Sentinel, the voracious fighter or the diplomat? Is there a third option? Can I keep quiet? Certainly, the game feels risky at every turn, just like the books never guarantee a character's safety, no matter how beloved they may be.

Interestingly, although I know the *Game of Thrones* content quite well, I also started playing *Tales of the Borderlands* recently, too. *Borderlands*? What is that? Some kind of shooter? No, I don't play shooters much. It's not so much that I dislike guns as that I am useless at the skills involved, and generally disinterested. Assembling a massive gun-

toting robot and then peppering everyone with bullets in the Telltale version was quite enjoyable. There was only a little bit of shooting and lots of story.

And, it's a fabulous setting. Orbital cities, mega-corporations, janitorial jokes, exciting vaults and mischievous sisters. I love it. If it weren't for Telltale, I'd never have engaged with the content at all. Telltale *Minecraft*? I honestly can't picture how that's going to work but, with choice and consequence, QTEs and fantastic dialogue, how can it disappoint? If I can share the experience with my kids and not have to hear any more lengthy monologues on the merits of this sword over that, take my money.

Telltale games have become TV for me, which I almost never watch now, "binge watching" of series' like *Breaking Bad* aside. It's putting on a comfy pair of trackies, making a cup of tea, getting some bickies, fruit, chocolate and settling in to be told a good story, usually in a familiar world. If I have to throw my spoonful of ice-cream onto the floor occasionally to frantically mash buttons and save someone's life, it's worth it.

With devices like "he will remember that," now evolving into a touching tint to someone's impending demise, it's hard not to appreciate that the Telltale formula is really starting to come into its own. These games are for gamers and non-gamers alike. Even my non-gamer husband has played *The Walking Dead*. So, let's press W to toast Telltale, and enjoy an endless abundance of our favourite content, well written and engaging. 🍷



MEGHANN O'NEILL wouldn't mind making a toast to Jaime Lannister. The book version. Actually, no. Cersei would have her killed.





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STRIX-GTX960-DC2OC-4GD5



### READY TO GAME

What's awesome and goes well with a new graphics card? A new game of course! For the period of 30th March 2015 until 30th May 2015, a game code for The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt can be redeemed with the purchase of any ASUS NVIDIA GeForce GTX 900-series graphics card – booyah! But The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt doesn't come out until 22nd May 2015, we hear you say. Not to worry, redeem your game code prior to 22nd May 2015 and be ready to play when the game is first released. Winning!

### Facebook

ASUS Australia & New Zealand

### Website

[www.asuspromotion.net/au/witcher](http://www.asuspromotion.net/au/witcher)





# A Collection Aside



This month, these games come with their measure of disorientation and despair. Does this mean they're depressing? Not necessarily. With an eye to the bigger picture, there is beauty and compelling play within. After spending time with them, **MEGHANN O'NEILL** reports that her stress condition is Relaxed. She's leaving both prayer and ale for those who need it more.

## DARKEST DUNGEON

DEVELOPER RED HOOK STUDIOS

PRICE \$20

[www.darkestdungeon.com/](http://www.darkestdungeon.com/)

EARLY  
ACCESS

■ This place changes a person. There's no doubting it. You may enter your family's estate as relatively sane, but before a single quest is finished, your band of explorers will be bickering, at best. More likely, darkness, hunger and injury will have pushed them to paranoia, fear, selfishness or one of any number of dangerous, yet hilarious, stress conditions. An abusive companion might admonish another for not dodging well enough, while a masochistic one will refuse healing.

Still, Darkest Dungeon is an absolute delight. As well as complaining, backstabbing, whoring and vomiting, there are complex, intertwining systems to control whatever you'd care to engage with. This includes managing loot/gear, character stats, turn based combat, town upgrades and, of course, stress. Find heirlooms to upgrade the abbey, thus making flagellation more effective for those of your characters banned from gambling. Or, you know, because they like it.

Death is inevitable, but everyone is either replaceable or saveable, for a price. Described as "a game about making the best of a bad situation," the introduction asks, "What will you sacrifice to save the life of your favourite hero?" A more apt question would be, "Why should I try to see my favourite hero safely to the end of this dungeon if she is so bent on her own, and everyone's, destruction?" But, no, it's not their fault. The estate is making them this way. We must remain kind.

So, with a larger pool of heroes than you need, it is safe to leave some to drink or pray in town. As they gain levels, their unique value becomes clearer, partially through player



direction but also as a result of the quirks acquired while adventuring. I had, for a while, a Jester who could deal amazing damage, but stole half of all the money we found. Then there was the Seeker Leper who just constantly begged for death. He was a good healer but he made me uncomfortable. I visit him in the cemetery.

The storytelling is exceptional, with a dry narrator providing backstory, gameplay hints and commenting on such things as your stepping on a trap; "Ambushed by foul intervention." He's a bit like the game master who takes pleasure in your misfortune, but you like him anyway.

"Overconfidence is a slow, but

steady, killer." Thanks, mate, I do realise I just mismanaged everyone to death. The haunted house setting may be modest, but it is beautifully detailed.

Darkest Dungeon is still in Early Access and the UI is sometimes inadequately explained. Also, there isn't a lot of impetus to camping yet and combat feels ponderous, more due to the (otherwise excellent) animations than the turn-based nature of encounters. With good positioning, ability management and manipulation of the environment, like light influencing surprise and damage, combat is challenging. Learning, through failure, leads to greater success.

If you want to buy this now, there is a lot of content available. Even provisioning each mission is thorough. Buy a shovel, or potentially take damage against a rock barrier? I mean, it's only a hitpoint or two, not like a reason to freak out and become Abusive or anything. Of course, when someone starts yelling abusively, someone else might run to the back of the combat queue, where their melee abilities are of no use. It is a complex, intertwining horror for everyone in your employ, then ale.





## SANDSTORM

DEVELOPER DANIEL LINSSSEN

PRICE \$3

[managore.itch.io/sandstorm](http://managore.itch.io/sandstorm)

■ One of my favourite classic adventures featured a desert setting. I'm talking about Quest for Glory 2, with the dying of thirst and cowardly dinosaur mounts. Of course, if your saurus ran away, it could be found safely back in the stable, come morning. I purchased Sandstorm because a screenshot reminded me of QFG2. It's a lot darker. There's no wanting to be a hero here, just a dangerous pilgrimage. And, if your camel successfully eludes you, death will soon follow.

For at least the first forty minutes of playing, I had very little idea what I was doing. I didn't know what the camel was for. I also didn't know what the collectable items did, though they were clearly doing something. There were mad messages from someone very familiar and artifacts that made no sense. Meanwhile, the washed out yellow world revolved, sickeningly, as I just tried to walk in a straight line, only barely aware of what my objective actually was.

Amazingly, although I still haven't finished the game, I now know how to do so, and exactly how close I have come to succeeding a couple of times. Each of my items plays its part and losing the camel sends me into a genuine panic. He's so wayward, and so important. This is a difficult game, recommended for the very patient and the very careful. The progression from, "what is going on?" to, "I need this right now and I don't have enough of those to get it safely," is incredible.

PCPP contacted Sydney based designer, Daniel Linssen, to ask after his intention for the game. He says, "I hoped the player would fear getting utterly lost. I wanted that to be an ever present danger." Indeed, the game is structured so that, as soon as you understand its scale, the pressure

RELEASED



builds incrementally towards the ending. The disorientation on each new morning becomes increasingly unbearable, yet you must deal with it quickly, or die.

As well as QFG2, Sandstorm reminded me of the time I embarked on a nine-hour, solo hike in Wilpena Pound. While climbing a peak, I lost the trail markings, then slipped and got a piece of swordgrass lodged up my nose. As a fog rolled in, I was actually a bit scared. It was a few hours before I found the trail and another hiker, who helped stop the bleeding. This game really captures the loneliness and desperation of a journey gone wrong, as well as the hope that things might still be alright.

As well as Sandstorm, Linssen has released a number of free games, many stemming from game jams and challenges.

You can find them here. <http://managore.itch.io/> They are an interesting mix of platformers and puzzle games, for engaging the imagination. Linssen tells us, "I love to try to find simple but unique mechanics, and then explore those as much as possible. I think each of my games is an exploration of a really simple idea." This is something Sandstorm does to great effect.





## GRAVITY GHOST

DEVELOPER IVY GAMES  
PRICE \$15, "TWO FOR ONE FOREVER"  
[gravityghost.com/](http://gravityghost.com/)

RELEASED

■ There is really only one word to describe Gravity Ghost and that word is, "Whee." It's a bit like going to Lunar Park and riding the Rotor, then the Tumble Bug, then the Rotor again. Then, trying not to throw up on the Ferris Wheel while your kids are chucking fairy floss at each other. This vibrant, physics puzzler is, quite honestly, the first game that has ever made me feel genuinely dizzy. It is both a grand, cosmic adventure and an exercise in how to relinquish control.

I'm not going to lie. I spent, at least, the first two constellations in utter, whirly frustration. I had no idea how to make the little, green lady go where I wanted her to go, with either keyboard or controller. In one level, full of glass bauble planets, I clumsily smashed every single one with my "bull on a china shop trajectory," unable to slow the fall or land gracefully. The game requires a kind of "stubborn patience," like the willingness to circle your objective many times before accidentally landing on it.

Sounds horrible? It's really not. As I unlocked abilities, like heaviness and gliding, I stopped trying to chart a course altogether. Oh, the pretty patterns you can make out of different coloured hair in space. Then, as soon as you stop striving, an offhand keypress will see you safely to the next level. It's like when you think too hard about the process of walking, you trip over. I don't pretend to understand it, but by the time the game was finished, I was definitely sad to not be whirling any more.

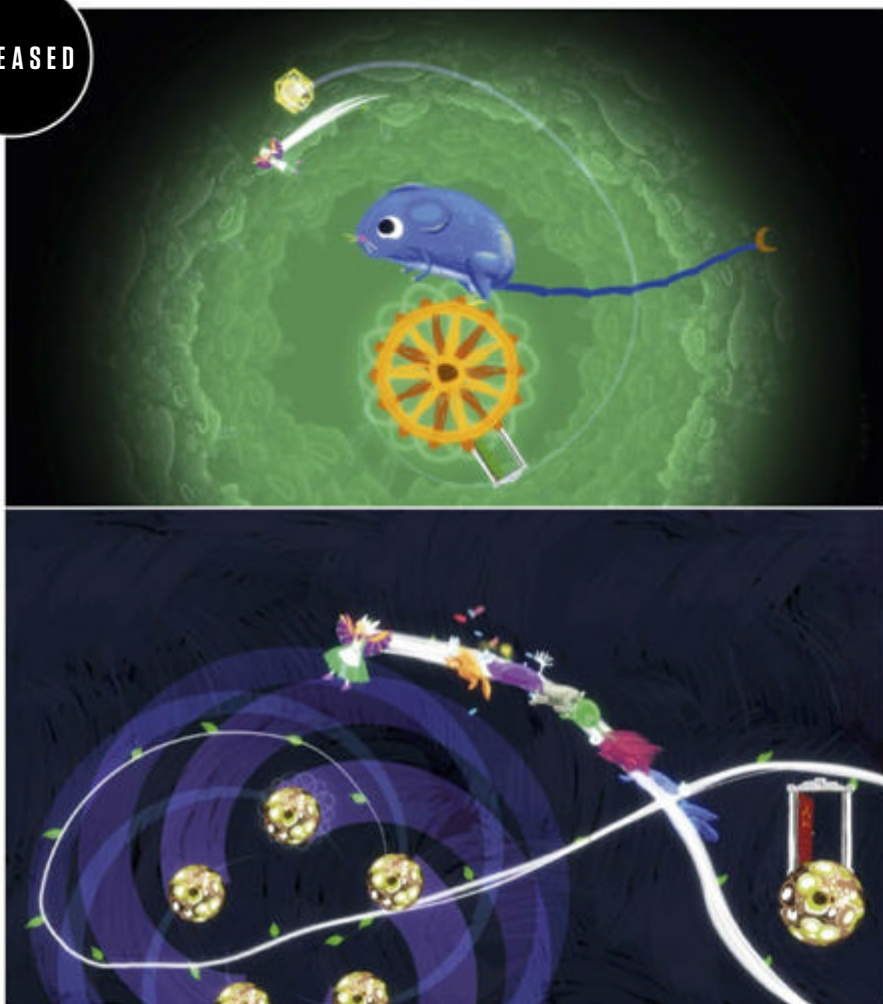
So, launch into orbit and relax. There is much to enjoy. The artwork is gorgeous, colourful and quirky. You might meet a deer

with knee-high socks or, as one "boss fight" plays out, collect lettuce for a hungry rabbit. Sounds easy? Herding lettuce at zero gravity, while matching angles and flight paths, is no mean feat, really. Who are these amazing creatures? Simply, the story and characters are lovely, with voiced dialogue like,

"Welcome to the afterlife, here is your hug."

Another key component of the game is terraforming. You can make a planet bouncy if you need to propel yourself further from it. Or, if your objective is stuck below ground, turn it into a water world and swim to its core. I mean, I'm no expert on these things, but that totally makes sense, sort of, in a 2D context. Although the terraforming idea allowed for some moments of, "ah, I know what to do here," it seemed underused, especially as most levels were solved chaotically, in my experience.

Still, with a mix of things to do, like rolling ball mazes and variations on the path through the game, I never got bored. Frustrated, then Zen-like, yes, it's a process. I probably wouldn't recommend it to everyone. Would I recommend it to some kind of astronomical engineer, or gravity expert? If you are such and you play it, please write in with a detailed analysis of the game's controls. Otherwise, it's a cute diversion to get lost in, ever twirling and whirling in beautiful space.





## COMPOSER

# BEN PRUNTY

EXPLAINS THE PROCESS OF CREATING AN EVOCATIVE AND COLOURFUL SOUNDTRACK.

### What mood/feeling do you hope your music evokes in the player?

Mostly I wanted it to go between feeling like pop-rocks going off in your soul and a kind of deathly melancholy, like the game itself.

### How did you set about achieving this?

A lot of it was choosing unique instruments. I took inspiration from William Orbit, who never let himself get bogged down by limitations of genre.

### What tone colours, or instruments/sounds, did you use and how did you choose them?

The single biggest contributor was Jeremiah Savage's Acoustic Refractions, an instrument library made up of recordings of household objects mixed with synthesizers. It's one of my favorite products in the music world. It was, sadly, discontinued in 2011.

### Gravity Ghost is all about motion and movement, how is this idea supported by the music?

Choice of tempo is the biggest consideration, then finding chord progressions that support the idea of fun movement. It's more of an art than a science.

### The pieces are evocatively named, often for narrative ideas, gameplay concepts or animal characters. How were you given direction for making this music?

Erin (Robinson) pretty much let me do whatever I wanted, and simply encouraged me to be bold and weird. I made music that I thought would fit and then we'd find a place for it. The game changed drastically over the course of development and many early tracks I made ended up without a place in the game. The Mystic, for example, was meant as music for the Guardians, but

when Erin decided to add voice acting to the game midway through development, the track was too "busy" to really fit. So it was instead used as regular gameplay music.

### When, during the process, did you see the artwork? How did it influence composition?

I saw artwork from when I first joined the project in 2010. It was probably the main influence on the sound. I tried to match that rainbow of color, musically.

### Given FTL's music altered texturally between combat and exploration, why discrete pieces for Gravity Ghost?

A dynamic music system simply wasn't considered, at least at first. FTL's dynamic music was made at the request of the developer. After FTL came out, we toyed with the idea for Gravity Ghost, but it wasn't really appropriate. Plus I had written more than half of the soundtrack already at that point.



### How did you approach making a set of pieces that are unified, or sound like they belong together?

After making the first few tracks of a soundtrack, you have a toolkit of instruments, chord progressions, and melodies. You can then reuse and reshape them for the rest of the soundtrack and BAM - cohesive sound. **PC**





# 10 TO WATCH



## MAGICKA 2

DEVELOPER PIECES INTERACTIVE  
PUBLISHER PARADOX INTERACTIVE  
DUE MAY 26  
[www.magicka2.com](http://www.magicka2.com)

The sleeper indie hit *Magicka* turned out to be such a success that Paradox Interactive commissioned a second game in the series. For those unfamiliar with the concept of *Magicka*, it's a co-op ARPG in which players take the role of mages capable of combining elements to create powerful offensive and defensive spells. Predicated on chaotic co-op/competitive multiplayer, a huge variety of spells to discover and goofy humour, *Magicka 2* should fill the *Magicka* shaped hole in your heart.



## BLOOD BOWL 2

DEVELOPER CYANIDE STUDIO  
PUBLISHER FOCUS HOME INTERACTIVE  
DUE JUNE  
[www.bloodbowl-game.com](http://www.bloodbowl-game.com)

The first time Cyanide attempted to make a game based on Games Workshop's veteran fantasy sports tactical table-top game, the results were a mixed bag. There was some definite fun to be had in their blood-soaked take on Gridiron but thanks to the rather obtuse AI, teams would often play against their strengths, leading to some frustrating and stupid plays. This shouldn't be the case with *Blood Bowl II*, as the developers are going out of their way to make sure the AI is far more solid and reliable, making for more coherent team strategies and enemy tactics.

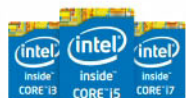
## THEO & LIZZY

DEVELOPER BUTCHERLAB  
PUBLISHER BUTCHERLAB  
DUE 2015  
XXXXXXXX

Billed as "A story of love, prejudice and running on ceilings", *Theo & Lizzy* is a rather promising, not to mention charming looking puzzle platformer and the debut game from new indie studio Butcherlab. Theo is a young man who, lives on the ground. He is in love with Lizzy, who along with her friends and family live on the ceiling. Theo has a special ability that keeps the pair from being eternally apart – he can move on both the floor and the ceiling, and switching between these two planes will form the crux of the puzzle platforming.



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## HALO: SPARTAN STRIKE

DEVELOPER 343 INDUSTRIES  
PUBLISHER MICROSOFT STUDIOS  
DUE 2015

[www.halowaypoint.com/en-us/games/halo-spartan-strike/windows](http://www.halowaypoint.com/en-us/games/halo-spartan-strike/windows)

Up until now, aside from a brief aside as a muddled RTS, the Halo franchise has concentrated on, and some would say all but perfected the FPS genre. Halo: Spartan Strike branches away from the core franchise, both in setting and style, as it will deliver fast paced twin-stick shooting action set in a number of Spartan military training simulations and introduce a number of new weapons and armour abilities to the Halo universe, including the interesting sounding Suppressor and Binary Rifle.



## STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT

DEVELOPER EA DICE  
PUBLISHER EA  
DUE 2015

[Starwars.ea.com/battlefront](http://Starwars.ea.com/battlefront)

Honestly we don't know a huge deal about Star Wars: Battlefront. What we do know is that DICE are building the game using the gorgeous Frostbite 3 engine and that rather than being a sequel to Battlefront II, the game will instead be, according to Studio Head Patrick Söderlund, "DICE's interpretation of what Battlefront should be". They will presumably be modelling the game around their Battlefield franchise but fans of Battlefront needn't worry – there will be elements from the first two games woven into Star Wars: Battlefront.

## SOLARIX

DEVELOPER PULSETENSE  
PUBLISHER PULSETENSE  
DUE 2015

[www.pulsetense.com/solarix](http://www.pulsetense.com/solarix)

The sole survivor of failed genetic experiments, the main character of Solarix has spent years avoiding infected and mutated crewmates with his only companion being a distant, hopefully not imaginary voice. Now a company clean-up crew is hunting down survivors to leave no evidence of the experiments. How long can he survive with his sanity, or at least what is left, intact? A combination of stealth and survival gameplay where remaining undetected through use of the environment in massive, open ended levels sounds pretty damn appealing to us.



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## CARMAGEDDON REINCARNATION

DEVELOPER STAINLESS GAMES  
PUBLISHER STAINLESS GAMES  
DUE EARLY ACCESS  
[www.carmageddon.com/reincarnation](http://www.carmageddon.com/reincarnation)

Another Kickstarter success story raising over \$600,000 USD before being given another \$3.5 million by Bullfrog co-founder Les Edgar so the game could also be developed for next-gen consoles. Reincarnation looks to recapture the nihilistic magic of the car combat game, bringing back all the blood, speed and spectacular crashes that made up the original games. Reports from the early access build are mixed, but even so, the thought of hooning around in a supercharged death-machine looking to splatter other drivers and pedestrians alike is enough to make us excited.



## ASSASSIN'S CREED: CHRONICLES

DEVELOPER CLIMAX STUDIOS/UBISOFT MONTREAL  
PUBLISHER UBISOFT  
DUE APRIL 21 (FIRST CHRONICLE)  
[www.assassinscreed.ubi.com](http://www.assassinscreed.ubi.com)

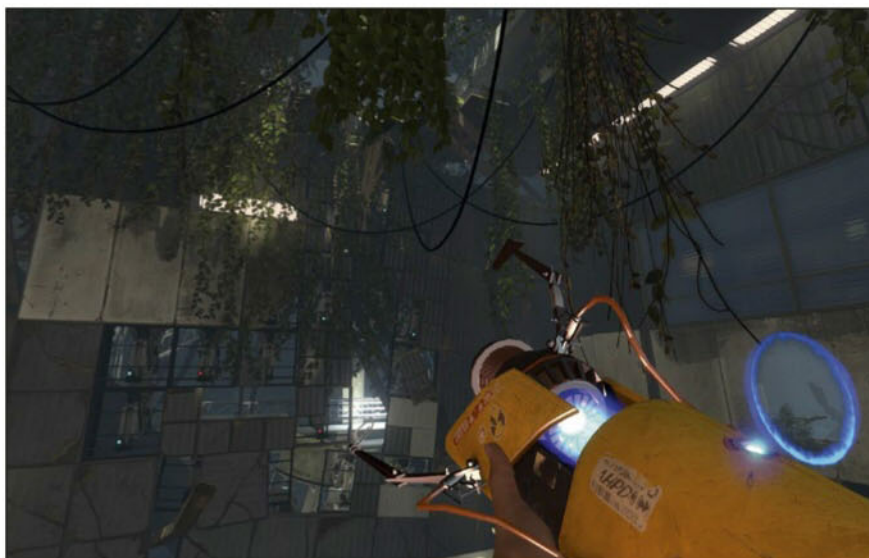
After the epic adventures delivered by the last few AC titles, Chronicles will be a decidedly different affair. Told over three 2.5D adventures, Assassin's Creed: Chronicles takes players to three locations as yet unseen in the franchise – China, Russia and India. So far there hasn't been much information about the Russian and Indian chronicles, but the first adventure will see players controlling a female assassin in Mind Dynasty China.



## PORTAL STORIES: MEL

DEVELOPER PORTAL STORIES: MEL MOD TEAM  
PUBLISHER STEAM  
DUE APRIL  
[www.portalstories.com](http://www.portalstories.com)

A complete adventure mod for Portal 2, PS: Mel has an extremely compelling premise and promises to be something pretty special. Mel, the subject of a failed experiment at Aperture Science falls asleep in the Aperture Science Innovators Short-Term Relaxation Vault, waking years later to the prodding of an imposter Cave Johnson. With a prototype portal gun, Mel must make her way through 20 fully voiced puzzle chambers to find out just who the fake Cave really is, discover what happened to the scientists in the facility, and most importantly of all, discover what has happened to her.



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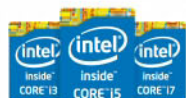
## SHALLOW SPACE: INSURGENCY

DEVELOPER SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES GAMES  
PUBLISHER PLAN OF ATTACK  
DUE TBA  
*Shallow.space*

The 12 galactic colonies are at war and the future of the human race is in the balance. Vast fleets of ships fight over resources and politicians lie, cheat and manipulate behind the scenes. Players take control of one of these fleets, vying to dominate sectors of space, annex resources and ensure the future of their colony. Players will be able to build and modify ships to suit their needs, using the resources and schematics they find. It all looks very impressive, and even more so when you take into account that the game is being developed by a tiny indie dev team.



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# GDC 2015

**HEIDI KEMPS**

went to GDC and all she got was this damned commission.



## ARMIKROG

DEVELOPER PENCIL TEST STUDIOS  
PUBLISHER VERSUS EVIL  
DUE 2015

It's been interesting seeing more and more industry veterans turn to Kickstarter as a way to fund game projects traditional publishers might pass up. Such is the case of Armikrog, a stop-motion-animated point-and-click adventure developed by many of the crew behind beloved PSOne title The Neverhood. While development has seen a few bumps in the road – the original delivery date was estimated as July 2014, which has long since passed – Armikrog is shaping up to be a unique and beautiful experience, both in terms of visuals and gameplay.

Explorer

is in a heap of trouble – he's crash-landed on a strange planet with his only his blind dog, Beak-beak, as a companion. He's currently stuck in a fortress called Armikrog that's filled to the brim with strange alien structures and devices that must be figured out. Of course, the only way to do that is with good old-fashioned point-and-click adventuring!

There are some interesting

gameplay decisions at play in Armikrog, like eschewing a traditional inventory system – you simply use the item if you click on the correct place after you've picked it up. Tommynaut's canine companion is also key to solving puzzles: being of much smaller size, Beak-beak can crawl into more cramped spaces, finding clues and items where Tommynaut can't with weird, warped monochromatic "Beakyvision" imagery.

Armikrog's sense of playful imagination is top-notch, with environments full of strange but lovable creatures, arcane alien architecture, and delightful animation that adds real personality to the characters and objects. (Beak-beak is just too cute when he barfs up an item he's retrieved for Tommynaut.) The stop-motion animation and handmade models give the world and characters an endearing sense of physicality and presence that polygonal models or prerendered CG just can't replicate. Any fan of adventure games – or animation, for that matter – would do well to put this on their watchlist.





# MEKAZOO

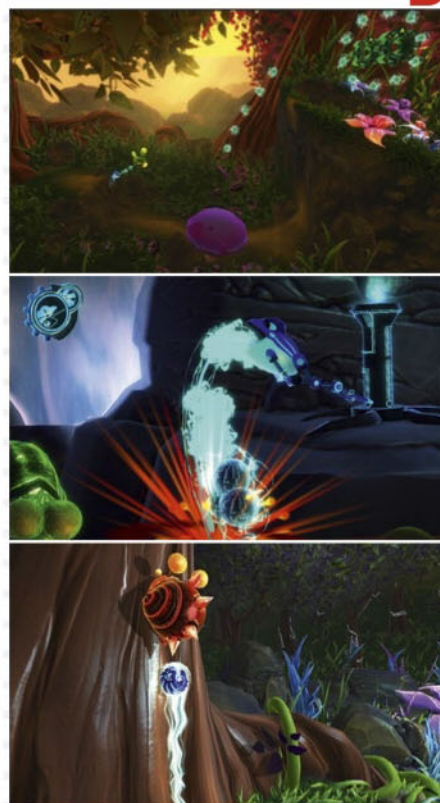
DEVELOPER GOOD MOOD CREATORS  
PUBLISHER GOOD MOOD CREATORS  
DUE LATE 2015

There's certainly no shortage of indie platformers out there, but Mekazoo manages to set itself apart from the pack in numerous ways. Created by a team of former Digipen students called Good Mood Creators, Mekazoo is a high-speed action/adventure that takes inspiration from some of the best in the genre – Sonic, Donkey Kong Country, Bionic Commando, and more – and turns it into a beautiful adventure that will challenge even hardened veterans of the run-n-jump.

Mekazoo throws players into a strangely beautiful biomechanical world where they take control of a pack of robotic animals: a frog, a wallaby, a pelican, an armadillo, and a panda. The stages are presented in traditional sidescrolling fashion, but they're all rendered in 3D polygon visuals, glowing with vibrant color and life. The stages are littered with threatening biomechanical flora and fauna that hinder our heroic "mekanimal" crew, but by using the various

elements of the stages – bounce pads, speed ramps, mid-air cannons, platforms to latch onto – players can guide the animals to safety. Each animal has a distinct ability: for example, the frog can grapple with its tongue, the armadillo can roll around with speed boosts, and the wallaby can spring off walls and high-jump.

It may look cute and cuddly, but the platforming on display here isn't kid stuff: You'll need to expertly swap between your critters in mid-action, chaining their varied abilities together to run, swing, and bounce past obstacles and challenges. Just clearing the stages will be an accomplishment for most, but there are plenty of hidden goodies waiting in the wilds for those willing to search, explore, and take risks. Mekazoo is shaping up to be a real gem: it looks gorgeous, has a fantastic soundtrack, and plays like the sort of classic platformer we'd spend every waking second playing in the 90s.



# GUILD OF DUNGEONEERING

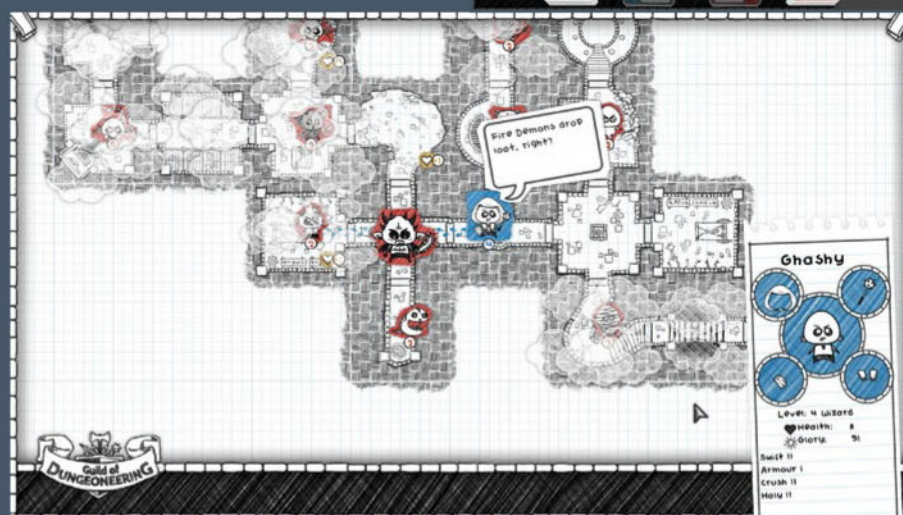
What do you get when you cross a roguelike, a building sim, a card game, a tabletop RPG, and a character that is overly attracted to adventure and shiny things? You get Guild of Dungeoneering, a fascinating blend of genres from upstart developer Gambrinous.

Most roguelikes put you in control of a player-controller character surrounded by unknown and unpredictable forces in a dungeon procedurally generated outside of the player's control. Guild of Dungeoneering, however, turns that all on its head: Instead of controlling the character, you are the one controlling the dungeon and the threats in hope of bettering the character. To do this, you pull rooms, monsters, and rewards from a deck of cards and place them to create a dungeon. One factor lies out of your control, however: a boss who lurks in wait and will attack the character after a set amount of turns.

How do you strengthen this warrior enough to beat the boss? You'll need to get them into rooms and place enemies to fight in order to level them up – putting treasure and monsters in the same place is a good idea. You'll be able to take control of your adventurer once they're in a fight, battling baddies with a card-based combat system. Win and glory, experience, and loot are yours, lose and it's back to the drawing board – in a somewhat literal sense, given the game's charming sketchy-art graphical stylings.

The concept behind Guild of Dungeoneering is quite novel, and the gameplay mixes just the right amount of strategy and luck to be exciting every time you send a hero to their potential doom. There are rewards for playing risky – stronger monsters drop better gear, and taking on the boss early means that it's weaker – but there's also a good incentive to play it safer. Ultimately, the fate of these intrepid adventurers will lie in the cards you're dealt, and it's up to you to put them to good use.

DEVELOPER GAMBRINOUS  
PUBLISHER VERSUS EVIL  
DUE 2015





# HIVESWAP

DEVELOPER WHAT PUMPKIN  
PUBLISHER WHAT PUMPKIN  
DUE 2015

Who here is familiar with the webcomic Homestuck? Probably more than a few of you, considering that the Kickstarter for this Homestuck-flavored point-and-click adventure title – helmed by What Pumpkin Studios – was funded to the tune of a cool two and a half million US dollars. But even if you can't tell Terezi from Tavros, Hiveswap is blossoming into something very interesting.

Hiveswap takes place in an alternate-universe 1990s, where young proto-hipster heroine Joey and her conspiracy-nut brother Jude find themselves suddenly attacked by a ferocious otherworldly being. After fending off the beast, Joey discovers a teleportation device in her attic that switches her with a resident of Alternia, the realm of Homestuck's grey-skinned, be-horned trolls. Joey must accustom herself to the unfamiliar troll society – including its proprietary, parodic online social and shopping networks – and help aid a band of scrappy rebels against a

fearsome doomsday weapon, all while paying homage to (and sometimes making fun of) adventure genre conventions. But if you don't know anything about the series, fear not: Homestuck's massive length and scope may have earned it the reputation of being the War and Peace of story-driven webcomics, but Hiveswap is very much its own beast, taking cues and giving nods to Homestuck rather than requiring you read the entire wiki to understand what's happening.

HiveSwap is slated to be the first in an episodic series – the story of the troll character Joey swaps places with will be the next episode - and given that the Homestuck comic itself was inspired by point-and-click adventure games, a game made on similar principles feels like a perfect fit. The direct involvement of creator Andrew Hussie and other lovable webcomic folks (like Dinosaur Comics scribe Ryan North) in the game's development is also a cause for much excitement.



# SHARDLIGHT

DEVELOPER BENSO4 AND GRUNDISLAV  
PUBLISHER WADJET EYE  
DUE 2015



The old-school point-and-click adventure game has been experiencing something of a renaissance as of late, but developer Wadjet Eye Games takes their devotion to this retro-flavored genre above and beyond. The company is known for creating engrossing titles that not only recall the engrossing settings and compelling storytelling of adventure games of yesteryear, but mimic their look in amazingly detailed, beautifully animated pixel graphics. Shardlight is one of their newest efforts, and it's already looking very slick.

In a dystopian future, a group of five individuals called the Aristocracy rules the government. In the wake of a bomb that wiped out a good chunk of the population, a plague has ravaged the land. The Aristocracy-controlled government offers the destitute populace, who live in eternal fear of the disease, a chance at hope: do dirty work for opportunities to enter a lottery for a vaccine. Heroine Amy is one such opportunist, who takes a job to fix a broken-down reactor. What she doesn't expect to find there, however, is a man on the verge of death who gives her a very important task.

The dystopian future aesthetic might be common these days, but Shardlight's low-res take on the trope is quite stunning: the hand-animated pixel graphics have a life and detail to them that really sets the game apart from the pack. Our demo consisted of a scene where we attempted to restart the broken reactor, which involved finding a numerical code. The developers are making a conscious attempt to reduce the number of "inventory puzzles", instead bestowing Amy with a crossbow she can use to interact with various objects in the environment. Shardlight's still a ways off yet – it's estimated to be about 2/3rds complete – but that's all the more time to get yourself excited for it.



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APRIL 22**

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# MACHINES OF WAR

**KATIE WILLIAMS** goes hands-on with Servo, the newest game to come from RTS royalty.



Servo is badass, putting the power to summon great, hulking robots of war in your hands. Servo is also crisp and beautiful, its bold colours and playful designs blithely setting it apart from the usual RTS smorgasbord of grey and brown. It comes to us via a new, somewhat dorkily-named indie studio BonusXP, but the team's got a serious pedigree behind it: about half of its 20-strong staff is from Ensemble Studios, the guys behind RTS classics like *Age of Empires*, *Age of Mythology*, and *Halo Wars*. PC PowerPlay caught up with BonusXP CEO Dave Pottinger to chat about what he calls "our big return to PC RTS."

## COMING INTO BLOOM

Set in the far future, Earth has long ago been abandoned and consumed by a dangerous energy resource called Bloom. Humanity has recently learned of Bloom's potential, though, and is now back to mine it in true human-like fashion. You'll play a mercenary mining outfit, battling other greedy corporations for control of the Bloom.

At the heart of your mining company is the servo, a one-hundred-foot tall robot formerly used as mining equipment that now also serves the secondary purpose of trying to flatten anyone who might get in the way of your beloved Bloom.

"The cool thing is, you make them yourself," Pottinger says, likening Servo's RPG-style customisation elements to the peanut butter swirl in a hunk of chocolate. Servo units are called down from giant dropships in the sky, and from there you can change them up: each servo has a pilot with a cool, unique ability, and all of a servo's actions are defined by the player's chosen gear.

"If I wanna put on a rifle, that'll change what I can do," Pottinger says. "We've got a sniper rifle here; equip it, and it adds a 'sniper shot' to our abilities. If I want to change out this servo's rockets for grenades, I can do that too."

There will be up to 1000 functional servo parts to play around with at launch, as well as three servos. The default, most human-like one is the most versatile, while a hefty, hulking tank-class servo is something that Pottinger calls "The Juggernaut." The third is a flying servo that BonusXP internally calls "The Floater" ("we need a better name," Pottinger admits sheepishly) that can manoeuvre around obstacles the other two land-dwelling servos won't be able to bypass.

## THE BLADE CUTS BOTH WAYS

While Bloom is the player's resource, it's also responsible for some of the biggest threats. Some of the corrupted "Bloomspawn" creatures that inhabit maps are essentially like *World of Warcraft* raid bosses, with devastating stun and area-of-effect abilities that require a

seriously planned and coordinated effort to take out.

We were shown a servo pilot with a particularly cool ability: the ability to make a Bloomspawn

its personal pet. The longer a game goes on for, the more aggressively Bloom behaves – so early in a match, the ability helps you hoard the Bloom resource, while you'll be able to sic it on your enemies later on when it turns nasty.

Speaking of match length, that's one of the ways in which BonusXP is adapting its RTS formula for the new generation of gamers.

"An *Age* game was about 45 to 60 minutes long," Pottinger explains. "A game of *Servo*, in most modes, is only about 10 minutes –

**SERVO**  
DEVELOPER BONUSXP  
PUBLISHER STARDOCK ENTERTAINMENT  
DUE EARLY SPRING







so people can play a lot of games in half an hour. We've found that's been great; it gets players really excited about the gear. Instead of playing 45 minutes to get one new piece of gear, you're playing 10 minutes. If you don't like your gear you can sell it for credits, maybe eventually earn enough to buy a crate for a chance of rare gear. There's more opportunity to customise your servo."

It also lends itself to greater experimentation with strategies; Pottinger notes, "People play a shorter RTS game a lot more differently." When your investment is only ten minutes instead of an hour, players are much more likely to experiment with less conventional ways of winning.

### FRIENDS AND FOES

The single-player campaign will last about 15 to 20 hours, but BonusXP knows that Servo's lifespan will depend more on its multiplayer offerings. After practicing in a skirmish mode against the AI, players will be able to play PVP and even co-op matches.

"We actually had envisioned the game really only as a PVP game for a long time, but then we added co-op because it was easy for us to implement. It turns out that, in the BonusXP offices, co-op is our favourite way to play," Pottinger reveals.


"We still expect that PVP to be more popular, but I'm hoping that co-op is at least as popular amongst players. We're currently designing more PVP-based maps, but if co-op is popular, we'll shift that balance based on what the fans like."

Does Pottinger hope the PVP lends Servo to some eSport potential?

"We didn't set out to make an eSport game," he says. "I wouldn't know how to do that. I'd love for it to be as popular as StarCraft or anything like that, but I think for us it's about being a great game first. If the game deserves it, then it will become that popular. If the game is fun, those things will follow."

Servo is impressive for a game that, according to Pottinger, has only been in development for under a year. As an "old-school paid game" with no in-app purchases, it'll be entering its Early Access stage within the next couple of months; final release is scheduled for spring.

Pottinger finishes our interview with a mission statement of sorts. "I don't want to make a game that's like what other games have already played, but I also don't want to make something so niche that only my mom is going to buy it. Servo has a lot of appeal and looks cool and has a chance, I think, to become really b comes down to what the fans think and how the reaction goes."

"I think the potential is here." 



### "BLACK AND WHITE... AND RED"

Servo, of course, will contain vanity items for the more image-conscious gamer, including the requisite camo and zombie skins. "My 11-year-old likes pandas, so we have a bloody panda for some reason,"

Pottinger says, to this PCPP reporter's mild horror.

"Don't worry. You can do a regular panda. It doesn't have to be bloody."









GDC  
2015

# STARS END

The final instalment of StarCraft II is almost here

It's been 17 years since StarCraft was unleashed on the world. In the games industry a few months is a lifetime – 17 years is practically eternity. The fact it's being played at all, much less one of the largest games on the professional eSports circuit, is no mean feat.

Yet, the last few years haven't been kind to the Korean darling. While strategy titles still control the top of the charts, relatively new kids on the block League of Legends and DOTA are – by far – in control. StarCraft has been on a declining path for a while.

Even veterans such as Sean Plott, who goes by the handle Day9 online, said during a Reddit AMA last year that free to play games have a much wider top of the funnel, and that this will “certainly...reduce the number of incomers”.

Blizzard has an uphill battle. But the company Top of Form has another chance to give the old girl some life – the final expansion for StarCraft II: Legacy of the Void.

During the Game Developer's Conference we were given the chance to go hands-on with Legacy of the Void's multiplayer, in the midst of a co-operative mode – something the game has never attempted before. Unfortunately, we weren't give any look at the single-player, although series producer Tim Morten said, predictably, the focus will very much be on the different factions within the Protoss.

“This is the conclusion to the StarCraft story which started in StarCraft 1 – this is where it all resolves. It's a big moment for StarCraft as a whole.”

“There is obviously an emphasis on Zeratul and the Protoss characters...it's an epic story.”

During the campaign the player will need to bring the different Protoss factions together to help complete missions successfully, and subsequent decisions to ally



with certain groups will dictate the flow of the plot. Ultimately, the goal will be to unite the race together.

But people don't play StarCraft for the campaigns. They play, ostensibly, for multiplayer.

This is a crucial time for StarCraft. It needs to bring in as many new players as possible, and Blizzard is keenly aware of this. It's part of the main reason why this expansion will be a stand-alone. Unlike Wings of Liberty or Heart of the Swarm, Legacy requires no previous StarCraft game to play. It's not quite a freebie, but reduces a huge barrier to entry.

“We want to make it easy as possible for anyone who wants to play, to just get in,” says Morten.

Last November, Blizzard confirmed a number of units for the Legacy of the Void. For the Terrans, there will be one new unit so far: the Cyclone, a walking mech which is able to target both ground and air units – while moving. And B can now teleport \*anywhere\* on the map, even without prior vision.

Another unit, the Herc, was announced at BlizzCon last year but has been ditched due to “not living up to our standards”,



TERRAN CYCLONE

**STARCRRAFT II: LEGACY OF THE VOID**  
DEVELOPER BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT  
PUBLISHER ACTIVISION BLIZZARD  
DUE 2015

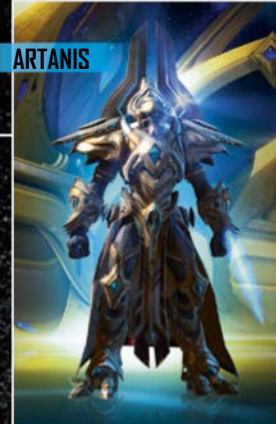
[Us.battle.net/sc2/en/legact-of-the-void/](http://us.battle.net/sc2/en/legact-of-the-void/)





Squint and you'll see the Flying Spaghetti Monster

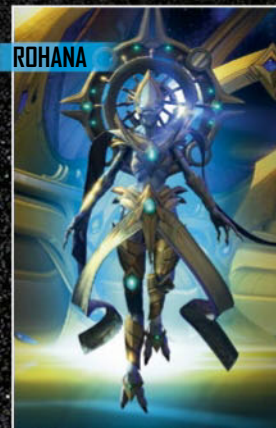
ARTANIS



KARAX



ROHANA



VORAZUN



ZERATUL



according to Morten.

Zerg have a new unit, the Ravager, which produces incredibly powerful bile, while fan-favourite Lurkers will make a return. A new upgrade ability will allow Swarm Hosts to send out Locusts.

The Protoss have a completely new unit called the Disrupter – a powerful piece of hardware which has a devastating area of effect attack, along with the new Carrier, which allows Interceptors to deploy at specific target areas.

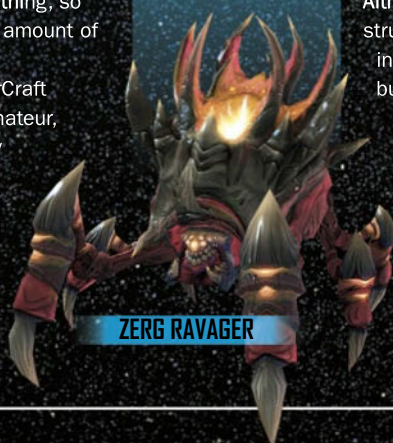
We were also given access to a completely exclusive unit for this presentation, the Adept, a ground ranged unit. It's a powerful unit, built out of the Gateway, and is able to project a mental image of itself – after 10 seconds, the unit teleports to wherever the mental projection is.

But the biggest element shown to us during the hands-on preview was the new co-operative play ability called Archon mode. In this set-up, two players control one base. They're given equal access to everything, so success depends ultimately on the amount of communication with your partner.

The problem with previewing StarCraft builds is that in the hands of an amateur, none of them can seem particularly overwhelming or significant. Even when controlled by a player, it really takes the intense match-ups of the professional scene to really see how they play.

But we did our best.

**Siege Tanks** are now able to be picked up and dropped off while in Siege Mode, which, if we're honest, is the only reason you should have Siege Tanks around at all. There is some concern in the community this change may be too strong.



ZERG RAVAGER

## THE CO-OP EXPERIENCE

Paired up with other journalists, we were given the choice of race to play. Given our limited experience, we chose Terran, with two other journalists as Protoss.

A word of warning – we were all in the same room. Communication between teams isn't likely to happen this way in most instances, when playing online, so this type of interaction is outside of the norm.

The co-operative Archon mode is, above all else, about communication. Between two low-level players our first inclination was to split tasks as much as possible, with one player given control of workers and base structures, with the other in charge of all field units. (We're happy to report PCPowerPlay was given control of the field).

"This method is all about teamwork, all about communication," Morten said. He was right, and it's a lot harder than it seems. Although the interface shows which units and structures your partner has selected, success in this method depends on communicating build orders as efficiently as possible.

At first, we began efficiently, building marines and other melee units. It's simple enough at first, but when expansions are needed communication is easy to break down. At several points, we were confused about who was controlling which expansions, which SCVs were being created, and who should be using abilities of the Command



Center – such as a MULE to extract minerals or a sweep to show off more of the map.

In any other multiplayer game, this is difficult enough. But StarCraft relies on an intricate relationship between units and counter-units. If you see a Zerg player is building a particular type of unit, you need to be ready to upgrade your own units in response – and start with more buildings like a Factory or a Starport.

A quick transcript of our conversation is enough to show how slow this process can be:

**PCPP:** “Are you building a Starport?”

**Player 2:** “No, but I will...”

**PCPP:** “Okay I’m going to take these units on a skirmish...”

**Player 2:** “Which ones?”

**PCPP:** “These ones down here...are you building more workers?”

**Player 2:** “Yep, yep.”

I checked. He wasn’t building more workers. Which is fine, because, hey, StarCraft is tough, but it represents how the co-op mode can either be a useful tool in the hands of the proficient, or just a way to keep already confused StarCraft newbies out of the fold.

Art director Allen Dilling agreed: “Around the office we’ll commonly talk about who will do base management versus field management, although it doesn’t mean you’re stuck to that role.”

“We’re going to see some really cool tactics we think, especially with people using micro in the same army. We’ll see some crazy stuff.”

Indeed, although none of those crazy tactics were on hand in our presentation. Over time we managed to work together more, swapping orders back and forth and picking out areas of the map to focus on. The addition of another player with you also makes for a larger battle, even faster. StarCraft is already a frantic game, but adding another player increases that intensity that can sometimes be lacking among games with less experienced players.

Between expansions it’s often easy for unit changes to be pushed into the background. Not so, this time – in fact, some of the units and upgrades here will make even StarCraft veterans change their ways.

For instance, Siege Tanks. Now they’re able to be dropped in Siege Mode, tanks can be used for harassment – like dropping them behind a mineral deposit. Similarly, Cyclones – which can fire on the run – can be used against large, slow units. We saw both in action during our time, and not only do they change the nature of play, they force players to respond in new ways.

A unit like The Adept makes things interesting for Protoss, but it’s the Disruptor which really got in our grill – a huge AOE makes defending supply lines even harder.

Blizzard has said Legacy of the Void

The number of starting workers on each team has been raised to 12, rather than six, with some of the starting mineral counters changed as well. Blizzard says this is an attempt to drop down on “passive” gameplay, and believe us, it works. Games get started faster, and more intensely.

multiplayer is designed to bring “consistent action”. Based on our time with it, we can confirm this is indeed the case. It’s a faster game with more emphasis on micro-management than ever before. More than ever, if you can’t control units, then you’re not going to get far.

But will it be enough to bring in new players? The stand-alone nature of the game will help, and certainly a cooperative mode is good fun – I can imagine a more experienced player helping out a less experienced friend, even if they just want to watch.

The private beta will be up and running by the time this issue hits the stands, although it’ll be extended over time. And Tim Morten was sure to tell us “there could be many more changes between now and when the game launches”.

StarCraft: Legacy of the Void is the fastest-paced and most frantic StarCraft yet. Whether that helps, or hurts, new recruits is up in the air. As for existing players, they should rest assured: StarCraft isn’t slowing down yet.

PATRICK STAFFORD PC



PROTOSS ADEPT



We finally have enough pylons



AUSTRALIA'S #1 PC GAMING MAG  
**PC PowerPlay**

# READER'S



# GAME YEAR

# OF THE

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A few months back the PCPP crew voted for their favourite games of 2014. Now it's time for **THE PCPP READERS** to choose their favourites!

2014 was a pretty damn good year for gaming, with a huge number of excellent titles finding release throughout the year. We asked you to cast your votes over a number of categories and tell us why you decided

to choose the particular games you voted for. The results were revealing, as were the comments. So read on to find out what you, the reader saw as the best games of last year.

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# MOST INNOVATIVE GAME/TECH



**WINNER:** The Nemesis system in Middle Earth: Shadow of Mordor  
**RUNNER UP:** Oculus Rift

## ODD OUTLIER:

**Don Bradman Cricket 2014** – we didn't even know it was actually a thing until we verified its existence using the magical Google machine. Google also showed us that it had remarkably high aggregate scores, something that is all but unheard of when it comes to cricket games. Is quality an innovation?

Winner 18% of the vote

Runner Up 9% of the vote

## THEMOOB

### South Park: The Stick of Truth –

“What?” You might say! “You are such a noob!” The snobs might say. But let's break it down. First of all, games based off TV shows and movies almost always suck to a large degree. Second, The Stick of Truth was trying to bring JRPG style to Western gaming, a pretty bold move. Yet it pulled them both

off. Sure, The Stick of Truth wasn't the best game of the year... but making a successful TV show based game using JRPG style yet remaining 100% true to the TV show's style and sense of humour? Innovative and brilliant.

## ANON

**Valiant Hearts: The Great War.** – Haven't played anything else quite like it.

## MICHAEL LAY

**Smite** – 3rd person MOBA is actually pretty fun.

## ANON

**Pono player** – doesn't do anything.

# BEST SHOOTER



**WINNER:** Wolfenstein  
**RUNNER UP:** Titanfall

## ODD OUTLIER:

**CS: Go**  
 Counterstrike Global Offensive was released in 2012.

Winner 38% of the vote

Runner Up 14% of the vote

## MICHAEL LAY

**Cloudbuilt** – But only because it's the only even moderately good shooter that came out this year and that I played.

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## ■ MOST RPG/ADVENTURE ■



**WINNER:** Dragon Age Inquisition

**RUNNERS UP:** South Park: The Stick of Truth/Divinity Original Sin

Winner 41% of vote

Runners Up 9% of vote each

**TIM HOSKING**

**Dragon Age Inquisition**, only just over Divinity and Wasteland 2 though...

**ANON**

**Dragons Age: Inquisition**. Still playing it and loving every minute.

### ODD OUTLIER:

**Far Cry 4** – even allowing for genre bleed, FC4 is hard to classify as an adventure or RPG. Sure there is character development and a few decisions to be made along the way, but FC4 is a game predicated on action in an open world, not on a deep narrative and connection to character.

## ■ BEST STRATEGY GAME ■



**WINNER:** CoH2: Ardennes Assault

**RUNNER UP:** Civilization Beyond Earth

Winner 24% of vote

Runner Up 18% of vote

**TIM HOSKING**

**Endless Legend** - way better than CIV 5, a sleeper hit that I note went un-reviewed by PCPP... awww...

**THEMOOB**

**Endless Legend** – 4X strategy games? Done to death. Fantasy strategy games? Done to death, followed by the kicking of a thousand dead horses. Yet here comes Endless Legend and blends them both into a great game utilising new features (not exactly the strong point of strategy games) that makes it stand out from the crowd.

### ODD OUTLIER:

**International Cricket Captain 2014**

It's not necessarily that odd a choice when you think about it, but until it was pointed out by the vote, we never would have thought of a management game as strategy instead of lumping it into the sports category. That's a failing on our part, not the vote itself.

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# MOST RACING/DRIVING GAME



**WINNERS:** iRacing/GRID Autosport

**RUNNER UP:** I don't play racing games

Winners with equal 22% of vote

Runner Up 18% of vote each

## ODD OUTLIER:

It wasn't so much an outlier but the second most popular vote in the category. In the voting instructions we asked people to fill in the categories they were most passionate about. It appears as though 18% of the voters were passionate about telling us that they don't actually play racing or driving games. That didn't happen in any other category. Definitely odd.

## DJPARAGON

**RaceRoom Racing Experience** – For a “free” sim, it has the best handling I’ve ever played. Simply the best. It’s a small team, development is going slowishy, but they deliver. With continuous incoming content and one of the best audio experience in a racing game, the only big bad thing is the lack of actual free content. You

got two cars and three tracks I believe. Don’t get me wrong, they’re amazing but still feel a bit light to me. But if you like it, you can still spend a few bucks and get more content.

## ANON

**The Crew** - Ubisoft nuff said.

# BEST ACTION GAME



**WINNER:** Middle Earth Shadow of Mordor

**RUNNER UP:** Wolfenstein The New Order

Winner 24% of vote

Runner Up 18% of vote

## ODD OUTLIER:

**Divinity Original Sin**

Action is a pretty nebulous term when it comes to gaming, with FPS, fighting games, side scrollers, stealth games and the like all sometimes falling under the category. No matter how far you push the boundaries though, it's hard to include a gradually paced turn based RPG with a huge amount of tactical environmental and elemental interaction as an action game.

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## BEST GAMEPLAY



**WINNER:** Middle Earth Shadow of Mordor  
**RUNNER UP:** Wolfenstein the New Order

Winner 22% of vote

Runner Up 13% of vote

### ODD OUTLIER:

**None.** Being a totally open category, no vote stands out as odd. Everyone likes what they like. Ain't gaming/democracy grand.

**ANON**

**South Park: Stick of Truth.** I really enjoyed the turn based combat, and the animation was so well done. It felt like you were playing an episode of the show.

**MICHAEL SCHMIDT**

**Divinity: Original Sin.** for offering up co-op style play in single player.

## BEST INDIE GAME



**WINNERS:** Divinity Original Sin/Shovel Knight  
**RUNNER UP:** Transistor

Winner 12% of vote each

Runner Up 6% of vote

### ODD OUTLIER:

**Path of Exile.** Wilks is a massive fan of the game and constantly annoys the rest of the bunker talking about his new build ideas, but the game officially came out in 2013. That said, the seasonal approach to new leagues does mean that there was a heap of new content last year so we guess it still counts.

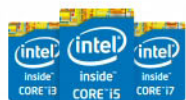
**MICHAEL SCHMIDT**

**The Banner Saga** – deep, moving, different.

**DJPARGON**

**Path Of Exile.** Yes, it's been available for a while but I can't see anything better than this great hack and slash made in New Zealand by a small team and getting new content quite often. Not to mention it's completely free. Honorable mention to Robocraft which has combined the fun of building stuff with cubes and killing everyone.

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## BEST DLC



### ODD OUTLIER:

**Wasteland 2: Red Boots.** The fact that 10% of voters were passionate enough to write and tell us there's no such thing as good DLC was odd, but the vote that stood out most was one for Wasteland 2: Red Boots. For those not familiar with the DLC, it was a joke that appeared on the splash screen of the game boasting day 1 DLC for only \$49.99. If you clicked on the box it was shown to be a joke decrying the idea of day 1 DLC.

**WINNERS:** Payday 2/Diablo III: Reaper of Souls

**RUNNER UP:** There's no such thing

Winners 22% of the vote each

Runner Up 10% of the vote

### GREENLAMP

**Europa Universalis IV: Art of War.** The amount of free content alone included as part of the DLC patch is enough for Paradox to win the "Community Carer Award". The quality of life improvements the paid DLC includes allows for a surprising amount of extra strategic depth

to EUIV, while the 30 Years War and Napoleonic/ Revolutionary France events and mechanics turn previously blob central Europe into a paranoid, scheming political theater where Kings and Republics alike in uneasy alliance will use hundreds of thousands of 'manpower' to die for Faith, Wealth and Power.

## BEST GRAPHICS



**WINNER:** Dragon Age: Inquisition

**RUNNER UP:** Alien Isolation

Winner 28% of the vote

Runner Up 17% of the vote

### ODD OUTLIER:

**None.** Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so no one vote is odder than the next really. We'd only be justified in commenting if someone voted for a text adventure and it wasn't even done in a pretty font.

### ANON

**Valiant Hearts: The Great War.** Not as flashy as some games released in 2014 but it was beautifully drawn

### THEMOOB

Does the **Metro Redux** count as a 2014 game? Because they are just so so sexy... and grim...

### MICHAEL SCHMIDT

Watchdogs (HAHAHA, no) – **Shadow of Mordor.** Gritty and real.

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OF THE YEAR  
BEST MOTHERBOARD





## BEST SOUND



**WINNER:** Alien Isolation

**RUNNERS UP:** Dragon Age Inquisition/South Park: The Stick of Truth

Winner 35% of the vote

Runners Up 12% of vote each

### ODD OUTLIER:

**None.** Again there were no odd votes cast. There were a number of single votes cast for games that we never would have considered, but much like graphics, the choice of what sounds good is a very personal thing.

**ANON**

**Valiant Hearts: The Great War.** Great music, especially in the chase scenes.

**MICHAEL SCHMIDT**

**Alien: Isolation.** I'll let you know why after I change my pants.

## BEST SINGLEPLAYER



**WINNER:** Dragon Age Inquisition

**RUNNER UP:** Shadow of Mordor

Winner 35% of the vote

Runner Up 12% of the vote

### ODD OUTLIER:

**Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare.** There wasn't really anything wrong with the singleplayer campaign of CoD: AW – in fact it's one of the best CoD campaigns in years, but even so, it's still a short, by the numbers set of missions eclipsed by any number of other games in 2014.

## BEST MULTIPLAYER



**WINNERS:** Gauntlet/CoD:AW/Titanfall

**RUNNER UP:** Smite

Winners 12% of the vote each

Runner Up 7% of the vote

**ANON**

**The Elders Scrolls Online.**

It copped a lot of flak but I enjoyed my time in Tamriel. Definitely jumping back in when it goes Free to Play later this year.

### ODD OUTLIER:

**Counterstrike: Global Offensive.** Again, CS: GP was released in 2012. It's a little too long in the tooth to be a 2014 game.

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# BEST STORYTELLING



**WINNER:** Dragon Age Inquisition  
**RUNNERS UP:** Alien Isolation/Divinity Original Sin

Winners 22% of the vote each

Runner Up 10% of the vote

## ODD OUTLIER:

**None.** We got a lot of votes but there were only 9 games mentioned in those votes. That said, someone did vote for GTA V on PC, which is a pretty neat feat seem it only just came out in early April 2015.

**ANON**

**Valiant Hearts: The Great War.** This game managed to tell a story about one of the most horrific periods in human history in a beautiful and elegant way, with very little dialog.

**MICHAEL SCHMIDT**

**A Wolf Among Us.** Almost paced to perfection.

# VOICE/MOCAP PERFORMANCE



**WINNER:** Dragon Age Inquisition  
**RUNNER UP:** Call of Duty AW/South Park

Winner 28% of the vote

Runner Up 17% of the vote

## ODD OUTLIER:

**Divinity Original Sin.** The music is fantastic and the voice work is great as well, but there's far more scrolling text than there is fully voiced dialogue.

**ANON**

**South Park: The stick of truth.** It may not be the some of the most thought provoking or dramatic of performances. But Trey Parker and Matt Stone delivered hilarious dialog just like the show, and in the end that's all I really wanted from a South Park game.

**ANON**

**The Banner Saga** (rotoscoping rather than mocap)

**MICHAEL SCHMIDT**

**Far Cry 4 - Pagan Min.** When you love to hate and hate to love a character, they nailed it.

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# OVERALL WINNERS

WINNER



Dragon Age Inquisition

2ND



Shadow of Mordor

3RD



Wolfenstein

EQUAL 4TH



EQUAL 4TH



Alien Isolation/Divinity Original Sin

Winner 14% of the vote 2nd 8% of the vote 3rd 7% of the vote Equal 4th 5% of the vote



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There are two games I'm playing a lot of this month, for two kind of different reasons. They're both in this issue, too - Battlefield: Hardline and World of Warships.

Warships is, as of writing, in closed beta, but that aside I'm addicted to it like my life depends on it. If I don't get to use my first-match bonus XP each day I feel disappointed in myself, that's how attached to the game I am. Now, I am sucker for giant floating ships of doom, and I like the way Wargaming puts games together. But I also like how games are ten to fifteen minutes long, so just about perfect as a palette-cleanser between longer bouts of gaming.

Also, sinking aircraft carriers with a spread of torpedos is pretty much a victimless crime.

Like I said, I'm playing a lot of Hardline, too, but that seems altogether more... manipulative? I'm not sure how to put it. Warships, being a free to play game, is designed around the addiction-curve of gaming investment, but Hardline seems even more mercenary somehow. Part of it is it's money-based economy, equating every shot and fatality to cash-earned toward upgrades. There's also a part of me that, as much as I do in fact enjoy the game, can't help but think that playing cops and robbers isn't quite the escapist getaway it was when I was kid.

But I'm probably overthinking - read on and let it know what you think.

**DAVID HOLLINGWORTH**  
Managing Editor  
[dhollingworth@next.com.au](mailto:dhollingworth@next.com.au)

**SCORING SYSTEM** | PCPP scores its games on a 1 to 10 scale. The higher, the better – though 10 is by no means a "perfect" game. We're not convinced such a thing exists, so consider a 10 a masterpiece of PC gaming, despite its inevitable flaws. A 5 is a decidedly average game; one that doesn't excel in any particular area, without being an affront to our senses – the ultimate in mediocrity. Below this, you'll start to find the games our reviewers suffered an aneurysm getting through; above it, the titles truly worth your time and money. And remember: a score is only a vague indication of quality. Always read the full review for the definitive opinion!



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#### WE PLAY ON ALIENWARE!

Thanks to Alienware we now play on the best of both worlds. The Alienware 17 is a 4K 17" gaming laptop featuring a blisteringly fast Core i7 4980 CPU, 8gb Ram and a Radeon HD 7900 driving the polygons. That's great on the go but we also have an Alienware Graphic Accelerator, a nifty little box that allows us to use a powerful desktop card as a graphics accelerator so we can use the Alienware 17 as a desktop replacement. Currently we are using an AMD 290X and it's more than fast enough for our purposes but the best part of the box is that it's essentially infinitely upgradable. Don't just take our word for it, you can check them out yourselves at [www.alienware.com.au](http://www.alienware.com.au) and tell em' PCPowerPlay sent ya'!





# Battlefield Hardline

Loose can(n)on!

DEVELOPER VISCERAL GAMES  
PUBLISHER EA GAMES  
PRICE \$79.99  
AVAILABLE AT ORIGIN, RETAIL  
[www.origin.com](http://www.origin.com)

The game has changed. Battlefield Hardline is an exit stage left from the oo-rah flag waving with new developer Visceral ditching the dogs of war for the boys in blue, and... pause for dramatic effect... embracing a story component which will grab you by the balls rather than something you quickly skip, bolting straight to multiplayer.

Cop this. You play law enforcer Nick Mendoza, arguably the most stunningly named protagonist outside of Suda51's wheelhouse. Nick wants to clean up the mean streets of Miami, but to do so he'll have to weave his way through drug dens, militarised patriots and triads while dodging crooked cops and lead flying around him.

The plot is doled out episodically for easy access and replayability starring top notch TV talent including Nicholas Gonzalez as Mendoza, Adam Harrington, Travis Willingham, Alexandra Daddario, Kelly Hu as your partner Khai and The Shield's Benito Martinez as your Captain. It's engaging, keeps you guessing and even manages to ease the dramatic tension with some very well-timed one-liners. It wants you to think it's some kind of hybrid between The Wire,

The Shield and Justified, but it doesn't quite have the same depth, though it does put in a valiant effort. It's easily the most fun we've had working our way through this style of shooter's single-player in a long time, and that's saying something.

Forget about Revolution, it's all about evolution. Battlefield veterans and purists may object to the tonal and gameplay shift for the campaign, but we applaud and embrace the change in direction, and just because it's different it doesn't mean you

**“Arm up with a Taser, Grappling Hook or Zip-line and flank, taking the road less travelled”**

can't get your straight 'Battlefield' on. Each scenario is a puzzle to solve, not unlike tackling an outpost in the Far Cry series. New tech, such as your really, really, really, super Smart phone allows you to mark targets, assess if they have outstanding warrants and uncover evidence as you formulate a plan of attack. The familiar arsenal set-up from the multiplayer has been transfused into the campaign, so you can kit yourself however you see fit.

You want to run in guns

blazing? You go right ahead soldier. Load up on Ammo Boxes, Bulletproof Vests or First-Aid Kits and have at it. Let that inner warrior off the leash, ignore tactics and mapping out an infiltration route, visualise that Arnie weapon montage and let the bullets fly. Drink in the sumptuous surroundings as cover explodes around you like a John Woo wet dream. Burn through mag after mag, reloading as your health bar dwindles and heavily armoured reinforcements test your endurance and resolve. It's bullet

charges, and while they may alert everything in a twenty block radius, there's no denying the morbid exhilaration blowing up a cluster of enemies sky high. Whichever of the more aggressive routes you favour, run that gauntlet and prove you are all that is woman or man. You're a goddamned renegade maverick, and we'd follow you anywhere, anytime for some urban pacification, with full knowledge we'll be chewed out by the Chief for supporting your reckless ways.

That said, there is a tremendous sense of satisfaction taking a predominantly non-lethal approach and playing it by the book. Arm up with a Taser, Grappling Hook or Zip-line and flank, taking the road less travelled. By utilising stealth, misdirection and thoroughly surveying your surroundings you can whittle down the resistance, disarm alarms to cut off the call for reinforcements and eliminate the opposition one by one. In another nod to Far Cry you can even toss bullet casings to alert and separate patrols and move in for the kill, err, stun.

The new mechanic, to "Freeze" up to three enemies by drawing your badge, is outstanding and a remarkably tense addition to your









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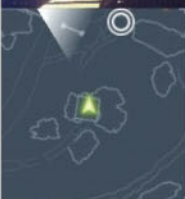
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ACTIVE SCAN  
PASSIVE SCAN



WHITE, Howard  
**REWARD**  
M16A3  
CHILD ABUSE (827.03)



The d-bag in the sunnies is going to break his nose if he pulls the trigger

Talk to the shoulder because the face doesn't want to know

## BACON BRIGADE

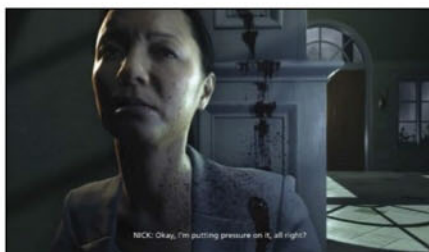
1. The backbone of any investigation, bag it and tag it.
2. Arrest warrant details and charges. This scumbag is going to pay for his crimes.
3. Mini-map – shows tagged enemy locations, vision cones and your destinations.
4. Your smartphone scanner. Scout out and plan your attack.
5. Clear icon to know a perp has an arrest warrant, stun only.
6. Alarm – calls in the cavalry, and you don't want that.



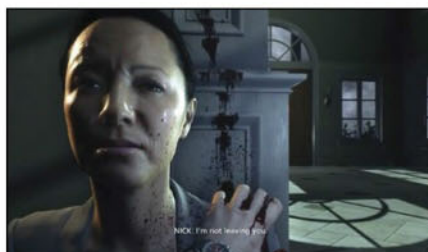
The traffic chopper became more extreme when the ratings dropped



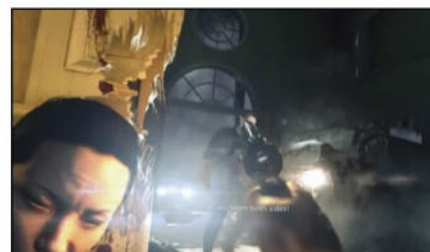
## DIRTY NICKY



1. Early on in the campaign your partner, Khai is takes a round in the shoulder.



2. You're called on to apply constant pressure to her wound when...



3. Scumbags burst through trying to punch your ticket and you repel them with Magnum force.



# Bloodsports TV

In post-apocalyptic Sweden there is only television

DEVELOPER TOADMAN INTERACTIVE  
PUBLISHER FATSHARK  
PRICE \$9.99 USD  
AVAILABLE AT STEAM  
[www.bloodsports.tv](http://www.bloodsports.tv)

The elevator pitch for Bloodsports TV must have been something along the lines of, "Imagine a MOBA that's also a Tower Defence game that's also Smash TV but with a reality TV spin". That one line pretty much sums up Bloodsports TV. It's a co-op tower defence that utilises MOBA style controls and upgrades set within a reality TV show format. It's a bit of a Frankenstein's monster when it comes to concepts, with the disparate parts fit together pretty well, and only occasionally does it run amok and cause problems.

Set in the post-apocalyptic Sweden of Fatshark's colourful but ultimately fairly unimpressive tactical RPG, Krater, Bloodsports TV sees players taking the role of a violent reality TV star fighting waves of villagers to protect a missile counting down to launch, the conceit being that it became difficult to find opposition for the show, so instead of recruiting fighters for the waves the producers instead threatened villages with destruction via missile and their only hope of defence was appearing on the show and trying to stop the launches. It's a cute concepts and works well in the Krater universe.

The "heroes" of the piece control much like the heroes of a MOBA. Click to move, the character automatically attacks nearby enemies and hotkeyed special abilities operate on cooldowns. Experience unlocks



After destroying enough villagers you have to face a boss - these guys hit hard and make solo play a real pain.

## “Imagine a MOBA that’s also a Tower Defence game that’s also Smash TV”

new abilities and between rounds players can use the cash they have accrued to buy new weapons, armour and gear. Each character can also teleport back to base to heal by hitting a hotkey. So far so familiar. Instead of having a multitude of characters, Bloodsports TV instead only features four of the archetypes commonly found in MOBAs - Slayer (DPS), wBruiser (Tank), Regulator (Crowd Control) and Medikus (Healer). Each archetype starts with two characters with another two that can be unlocked later. In a five-man group the resulting mix feels

more akin to an RPG party than a MOBA team. Limiting the number of archetypes and characters

Battles are fast and fun, and thanks to the tower defence style map design, welcoming to new players. Maps range from corridors to open arenas, each requiring their own set of tactics. Each map features one missile silo and multiple spawners that spit out defensive robots to aid the player in the defense of the missile. Unfortunately at the time of this review, finding a multiplayer game is something of a rarity, even with the drop-in, drop-out nature of the game.

Bloodsports TV can be played single player but that brings with it a host of problems that, whilst not gamebreaking, still detract from enjoyment. Playing a map solo essentially rules out the two support classes, Regulator and Medikus, and removes any real tactical thinking from the game, rendering each wave little more than a rush to do enough damage to bring the marauding villagers to their knees. It's still playable and often fun when going it alone, but without other players by your side it quickly becomes more of a slog than a joy. **DANIEL WILKS**

### WHY SHOULD I CARE

- You're sick of whining villagers
- Being bad feel so good
- You like MOBAs but hate the other team

### OR TRY THIS



**SANCTUM 2**  
COFFEE STAIN STUDIOS • 2013  
Smooth FPS tower defence  
You're the good guy



**DUNGEON DEFENDERS**  
TRENDY ENTERTAINMENT • 2011  
Co-op ARPG tower defence  
You're the good guy



**KINGDOM RUSH**  
IRONHIDE GAME STUDIO • 2014  
Exploding sheep  
You're the good guy

**VERDICT** Add another point if you can find other people to play with

# 7





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OF GOD OF ALL GODS



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# Pillars Of Eternity

Beyond Infinity

DEVELOPER OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT  
PUBLISHER OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT/PARADOX INTERACTIVE  
PRICE \$44.99 USD  
AVAILABLE AT STEAM  
[eternity.obsidian.net](http://eternity.obsidian.net)

**Wilks:** It's hard not to be swept up in nostalgia when you play Pillars of Eternity. There's an attention to detail when it comes to the controls and the HUD that makes the game both feel and look like an Infinity Engine game, and there's a level of difficulty and lack of handholding that harkens back even further to the venerable Gold Box days, but the veneer of nostalgia is but one of the facets of the game. It's a massive, beautifully written, sprawling epic and whilst it may call back to games of the past, it's also an incredibly modern game in terms of complexity and narrative. What do you think, David?

**Hollingworth:** That it manages to be both a huge nostalgia hit, but also play in line with the modern trend toward really upping game difficulty, is pretty impressive by itself - but then again, those old Infinity Engine games could be pretty damn brutal at times.

One thing that struck me immediately was the matching brutality of the narrative. Early party members come to sticky ends or betray (or both!), and when you make it to your first village, which is meant to be a place that a whole bunch of folks are heading toward in order to settle there, you find one of the grimmest images I've ever seen in an RPG like this. This game is dark. But it's also presenting a world that feels really lived in; from the wilderness areas that are scattered with bandit camps

and random skeletons, to the incidental stories you pick up from NPCs, Pillars of Eternity features a hell of a rich setting.

However it also comes with a pretty unforgiving learning curve. Daniel, did you find the beginning of the game particularly tough?

**Wilks:** I kind of charged bull-at-a-gate into combat with my first character, a Cipher (psychic warriors - think Jedi with a leaning towards Sith) and was firmly punished for it. The initial party makeup makes it a little more difficult starting as anything but a burly warrior type class, but I think that is part of the game's charm. It doesn't

**Hollingworth:** Yeah, and again, the game's adherence to, say, limited spell slots for spell-casters really doesn't help, either - you can easily find yourself out of spells in a real hurry. For my first character, I thought I'd try ranged, so went with a bow-armed Ranger, with a trusty wolf companion. There are some good synergies there, especially being able to slow down opponents, but you're still pretty fragile. At first, I missed the fighter-type you can recruit in the first town, and so me and my Cleric and Mage buddies were just getting really torn apart in every fight. We could certainly lay down some serious smack

“Ultimately though, as fun as the combat is, I'm playing for the intricately crafted story”

make allowances for anyone really - just presents the world and lets you loose within it. If you go to an area that you aren't a high enough level for, you will find yourself having to reload. A lot. About 12 hours into the game I started exploring the vast underground chambers of the Endless Paths of Od Nua. After a few cautious levels of exploring, disarming traps and killing, I found a hole. I shouldn't have jumped down. It led to a drake. My party only lasted a few rounds and the helpful tooltip told me that my accuracy was not nearly high enough to dent the creature.


on single opponents, even nasty ones like a troll, but two trolls, or bandit bands? Nope. Reload, try again, fail, go back to town, find the Fighter.

Still, the game's interface is nice and clean, and it's quite easy to control your characters and position them for optimum fighting. I just think, like a lot of old-school DnD, it really leans toward melee characters over ranged or spellcasters.

You've played a bit longer than me, and I must admit the sheer grind to get through some fights isn't sitting well. How is it later in the game once you're starting to level and expand your party?

**Wilks:** I love it. It's consistently tough but rewarding, both in terms of the feel of upgrading and the new areas you can explore. Ultimately though, as fun as the combat is, I'm playing for the intricately crafted story. It's a massive game and it's sometimes a bit too easy to lose plot threads and find yourself lost looking for the location for a quest, but I think that actually adds to the game. You're a novice adventurer who discovers they're a Watcher (someone who can see memories and departed souls) and doesn't have a handle on their abilities and what it ultimately means. Being a little lost is par for the course. Playing as a Paladin as I am now, there's also a really nice element of roleplaying in how I deal with situations. The god my character worships values passion and clever thinking and hates cruelty and stoicism, so every conversation and decision is potentially a god bothering minefield. Once you get your keep and have to deal with upgrading, defending and hosting guests there's a nice layer of management added to the adventuring as well.

**Hollingworth:** Yeah, there's enough interesting moral dilemmas and great story that it really does reward staying in character.

Pillars of Eternity has certainly rewarded all those who backed the game, and it's great to see yet another Kickstarter success make it to fruition. 

## WHY SHOULD I CARE

- You have a hankering to see what bugs Obsidian can miss patching out
- You think 3D is for kids
- Chris Avellone
- Josh Sawyer
- George Ziets

## OR TRY THIS



**DIVINITY: ORIGINAL SIN**  
LARIAN STUDIOS • 2014

- Intricately detailed environmental interaction
- Story lags



**WASTELAND 2**  
INXILE ENTERTAINMENT • 2014

- Amazing sequel to an amazing game
- Meanders



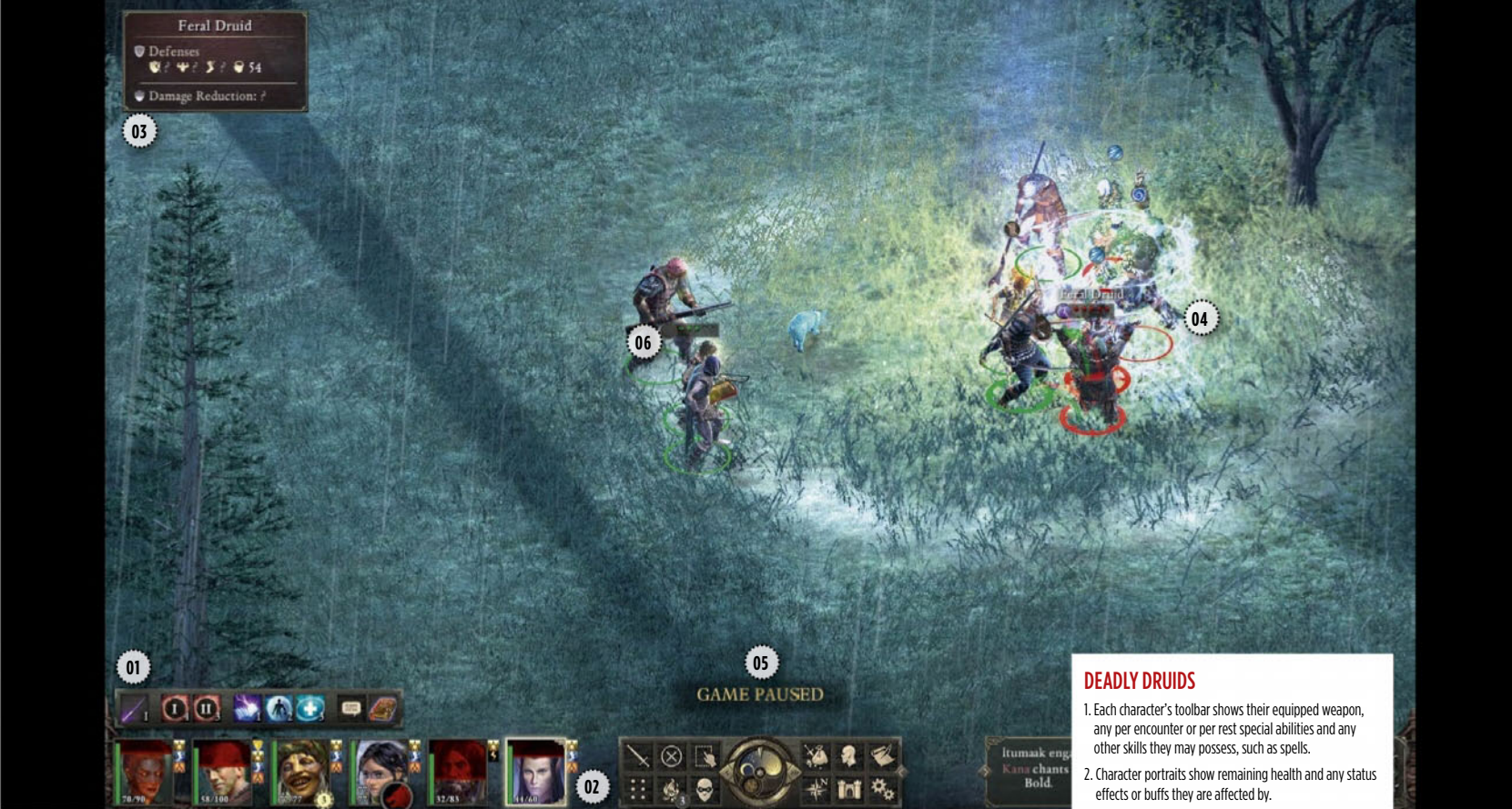
**SHADOWRUN: DRAGONFALL**  
HAREBRAINED SCHEMES • 2014

- Brilliant expansion campaign
- Base campaign is kind of weak

**VERDICT** Sprawling and beautiful in equal measure. It can be a tough slog, but it's worth it.

9





### DEADLY DRUIDS

1. Each character's toolbar shows their equipped weapon, any per encounter or per rest special abilities and any other skills they may possess, such as spells.
2. Character portraits show remaining health and any status effects or buffs they are affected by.
3. The more you encounter an enemy the more information you receive about them, such as their resistances and weaknesses.
4. This druid is about to shapechange into a powerful Stag form, a skill shared with player character druids.
5. The space bar pauses the game allowin the player to individually command each character. It's not really helping in this fight.
6. Ranged fighters usually try to stay away from melee but do have a habit of pulling agro.



Caed Nua is a keep that falls into the player's care. Upgrading various aspects of the keep attracts merchants, mercenaries and craftsmen.

Talk to every NPC you can - many offer quests or useful knowledge and some will even join your party.



A straightforward inventory system allows for quick item swaps between party members and the stash



### BLOOD PIT



1. What an interesting pit - perfect for a level 4 paladin to explore!



2. Nothing could go wrong if I climbed into the blood pit!



3. Oh god. \*RELOAD LAST SAVE\*



# World of Warships

Already, this is looking like a very well-balanced, gripping sim.

DEVELOPER WARGAMING  
PUBLISHER WARGAMING  
PRICE Free to play  
AVAILABLE AT CLOSED BETA  
[www.wargaming.net](http://www.wargaming.net)

I've been a big World of Tanks fan since its release, and while World of Warplanes left me kind of cold, I've had high hopes for World of Warships ever since it was announced. There's something about the slow pace of the 20th century, pre-missile naval warfare that really appeals, from the heavy broadsides of massive battleships to the darting attacks of nimble destroyers. It's just pretty cool.

And, thankfully, it looks like the game is going to be absolutely deliver.

As of writing, the game's in Closed Beta, and while there is a limited array of ships so far, otherwise the game seems pretty much feature-complete. All the ships classes – destroyer, cruiser, battleships, and carrier – are there, but are limited to certain nationalities. For instance, the Americans get carriers, but only the Japanese get battleships, and the Russians, Germans or British aren't there at all.

But what is there is wonderfully

realised. From the pacing of multiplayer matches to the UI that so cleverly keeps track of what all your various turrets are doing, World of Warships is fiendishly polished. Wargaming's taken the decision to allow main batteries to only fire at one point, but since you can free-aim (in fact, you can't lock your targets at all, as judging distance and fall of shot is an essential skill), you can

and relatively easy to manoeuvre away from at range, but inflict devastating damage and critical effects. All are represented in beautiful detail on screen, with raging explosions, lethal fires, and grand gouts of water from torpedo impacts.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the gameplay is how carriers work – they're much more like artillery in World of

**“The relationships between the other three classes of ships is very rock, scissor, paper,”**


attempt to bracket vessels sailing in close proximity. Secondary batteries of smaller calibre guns open up automatically at close range, and can fire all around your vessels, but are auto-aimed; and there are anti-air batteries as well, that only come into play when aircraft are in range.

Finally, destroyers, and some cruisers, have torpedoes, which are slow to reach their target,

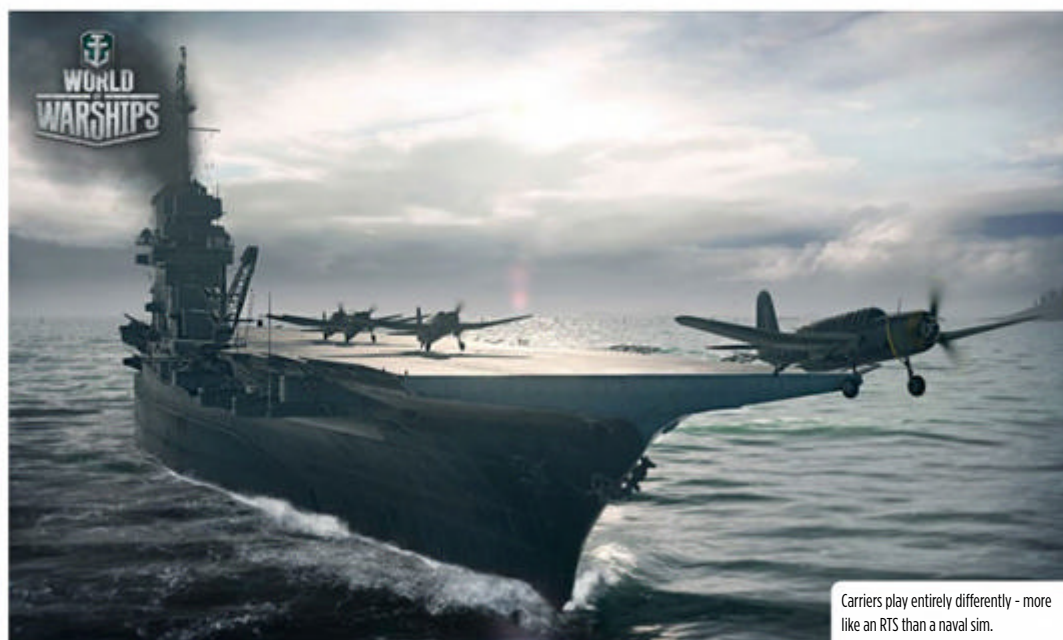
Tanks, but when you launch a squadron (which can be fighters, bombers, or torpedo planes), you can then control them on the top-down map, making the carrier experience more like playing an RTS. Fighters can be ordered to escort and protect other ships, while your bombers can deliver devastating close-in payloads. And torpedo planes are horrifying, able to lay down up to six lethal

fish at close range, capable of taking out even a battleship.

The relationships between the other three classes of ships is very rock, scissor, paper, though of course clever handling and tactics can always win out. Destroyers are great at getting close to bigger vessels and hurting them with torpedoes, while cruisers can swarm a battleship. Battleships, the biggest, toughest boat in the game are very slow, but can take out destroyers in a couple of salvos – but destroyers also have smokescreens... it goes on and on. And the matches have a pace and sense of weight to them entirely unique. Everything feels heavier and slower, as this kind of combat should.

You can definitely colour us very excited. **DAVID HOLLINGWORTH** 

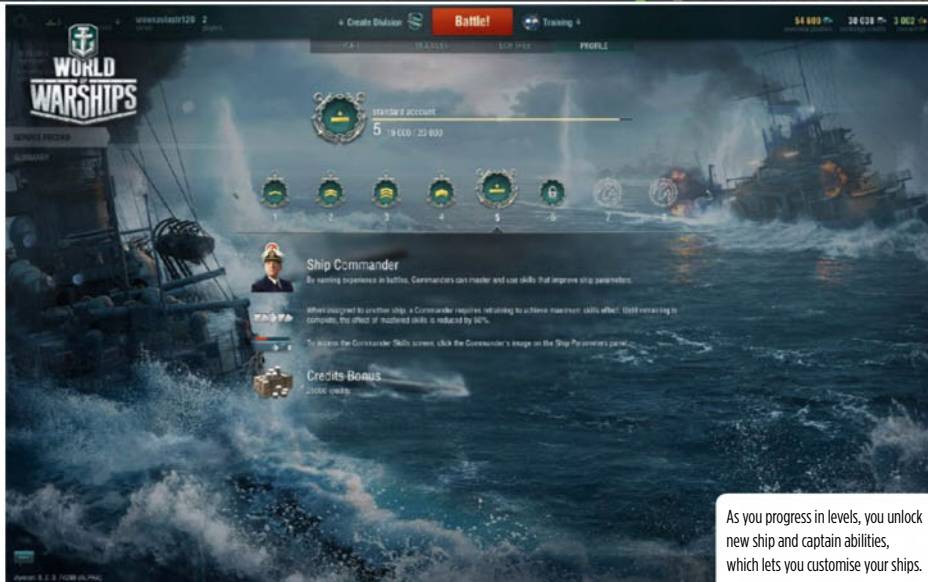
**VERDICT** Even in beta form, World of Warships is looking like one of the best big-ship sims ever made.



Carriers play entirely differently - more like an RTS than a naval sim.







As you progress in levels, you unlock new ship and captain abilities, which lets you customise your ships.





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# Assassin's Creed Rogue

'Black Flag II' makes waves on PC

DEVELOPER UBISOFT SOFIA

PUBLISHER UBISOFT

PRICE \$54.95 USD

AVAILABLE AT STEAM

[assassinscreed.ubi.com/en-au/games/assassins-creed-rogue.aspx](http://assassinscreed.ubi.com/en-au/games/assassins-creed-rogue.aspx)

Silly assassin - swords are not aerodynamic enough to be used as wings, no matter how much Redbull you drink!

What was almost assured to be an overlooked title sitting somewhere between the series' shining diamonds and polished lumps of coal (namely, Assassin's Creed Unity) due in part to its simultaneous release alongside its overhyped next-gen brother (again, Unity), Assassin's Creed Rogue is a surprisingly enjoyable instalment in the franchise provided your expectations are tempered, combining an intriguing and refreshing storyline with some solid if rehased seafaring combat mechanics and on-land gameplay that's begging for improvement.

Assassin's Creed Rogue takes place between Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag and Assassin's Creed III, and plays less like a sequel and more like a large expandalone. It runs shorter than a full release and focuses on providing more details on the lives of existing characters, while predominantly utilising modified versions of locations from both titles.

You play as the titular rogue, Shay Cormac, a member of the Assassin's Order who begins to question the morality of the brotherhood's 'ends-justify-the-means' approach, and over the course of the narrative comes to align with his former sworn enemies, the Templars. While admittedly underwritten and locked into the archetypical antihero role, Cormac and his tale are the two best reasons to play Rogue – as he gradually sides with the Templars we see characters on



“missions made a lot easier by my targets stopping mid-chase and accepting their fates”

both sides of the conflict who are good, evil, and somewhere in the middle. It was exciting to see such a nuanced depiction of the series' typically clear cut protagonists and antagonists, and it had me wishing moral ambiguity was a more regular series thematic concern.

Rogue might as well be considered Black Flag II, with the outstanding naval combat system cut and pasted. However your ship is a tad faster, more nimble, and has a few more weapon upgrades to unlock. You'll also find your own ship rammed and boarded from time to time, during which you'll have to dispatch the invading sailors while doing your best to keep your crewmen alive.

The old-school dry land gameplay is also pulled direct from the previous games, so be prepared for an easy-to-learn albeit depthless combat. The one exciting addition is the opposing Assassins who move quickly, will retreat after dealing damage, and do their best to hide and ambush you with their hidden blades. The stealth sections are a little easy, and the free-running also feels too simple – inside cities you can run directly at walls and hope for the best, while in forests the routes to higher ground, fallen logs and forks in trees, are too easy to identify.

Rogue is a decent looking game considering its origin on last-gen systems, with the only major

let down being the short draw distance. I encountered a couple of major bugs during early stages of the plot, with two consecutive missions made a lot easier by my targets stopping mid-chase and accepting their fates, but as I continued said bugs seemed to occur less and less frequently.

This is a great game if you're a hardcore fan looking to bridge the gap between the existing titles, experience a decent story, or if you're hankering for more of the ship-to-ship combat of the previous game. But if you're feeling a bit Assassin's Creed-fatigued or are holding out for some big improvements give it a miss. **ROBERT NORTH**

## WHY SHOULD I CARE

- You're still sad about Unity.
- You regret taking the leap of faith.
- Sid Meier's Pirates! isn't immersive enough for you.

## OR TRY THIS



### ASSASSIN'S CREED IV: BLACK FLAG

UBISOFT MONTREAL • 2013

- Like Rogue but with more missions!
- Sailing grows tedious over time.



### SHADOW OF MORDOR

MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS • 2014

- Less convoluted narrative.
- You're so close to being Aragorn, but you're still not Aragorn.



### SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

FIRAXIS GAMES • 2005

- Incredibly deep and immersive pirate themed fun.
- Not as immersive or pretty.

**VERDICT** It's a fitting coda to the 'Colonial America' story arc that should satisfy hardcore fans.

7



# FreeSyncing

New display tech, streaming services and more!

This time of the year is relatively quiet in hardware land, yet this issue sees two major new product launches here in Australia. The first is Netflix, a service that I've used extensively for the last two years thanks to the wonders of Unblock-US, a \$5 per month service that tricks Netflix devices into thinking my AppleTV is located in Beverly Hills, California. Hey, 90210 was the only US postcode I knew off the top of my head! As expected thanks to Australia's draconian television rights, the AU launch is a shadow of its US self, with a massively reduced catalogue. At least we've got Netflix now, and hopefully this video streaming heavyweight will be able to muscle up some quality content in the coming months and years.

The other major product launch is AMD's FreeSync monitor technology. Designed to compete head to head with NVIDIA's G-Sync tech, AMD did what many of us had hoped NVIDIA would do – work with the VESA display standards group to make this an open standard. That means it'll be much more widespread, as display manufacturers don't need to buy proprietary hardware to make their screens compatible. This should result in lower prices as well, though as you'll see with the review of the LG 34UM67, this isn't the case at launch. FreeSync also has limitations with minimum refresh rates, but you can read the review to find out more.

Wrapping up this month's tech coverage is a router roundup, featuring five of the latest high-end routers on the market. As expected, the promised speeds on the box are far from what gets delivered in a real world solution. If you can afford it, cabling your home with Gigabit Ethernet is still the way to go.

I hope you enjoy this issue's hardware, and I'll catch you again next month. Until then, see you on the Battlefield.

**Bennett Ring**  
Tech Editor  
[bring@next.com.au](mailto:bring@next.com.au)

## PCPP TESTBENCH

### CPU

INTEL I7 3770K  
[www.intel.com.au](http://www.intel.com.au)



### MOBO

GIGABYTE Z77X-UD3H  
[www.gigabyte.com.au](http://www.gigabyte.com.au)



### SSD

CORSAIR NEUTRON  
[www.corsair.com](http://www.corsair.com)



### RAM

8GB PATRIOT DDR3 2,133MHz  
[www.patriotmemory.com](http://www.patriotmemory.com)



### GPU

RADEON HD 7970  
[www.amd.com](http://www.amd.com)



### PSU

CORSAIR AX860I  
[www.corsair.com](http://www.corsair.com)



### DISPLAY

DELL U2711  
[www.dell.com.au](http://www.dell.com.au)



Our Power Award is given to products that are best in class no matter your budget.



Our Smart Buy Award goes to products that balance performance with price tag.

- 70 Video on Demand
- 74 Router Roundup
- 80 LG 34UM67 FreeSync Display
- 82 Hotware
- 84 Tech Menagerie





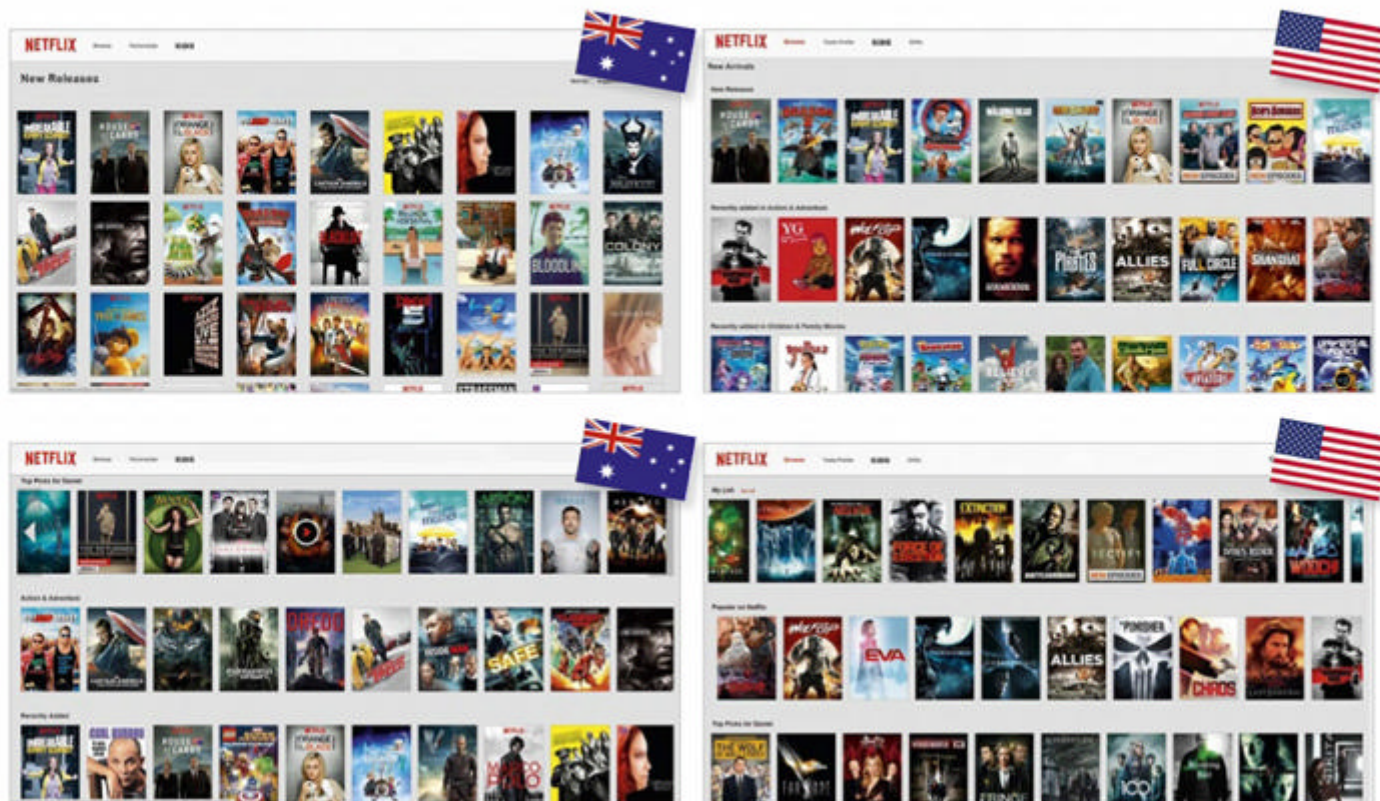


# LET THE VOD-WARS COMMENCE!

**BENNETT RING** occasionally kicks into standard definition.







The moment Australia has been waiting for is finally here. No, we're still not a Republic dammit, but we just got the next best thing – Netflix! Being the Internet-savvy, advanced PC users that you lot are, we're guessing a huge portion of PC PowerPlay's audience has already been tapping into this vast pool of quality video content via the wonders of VPN. Still, there's probably a good portion of you that haven't, so we've cast an eye across the various Video On Demand (VOD) services now available in the country, checking out the size of their catalogues, the cost, and their bandwidth requirements. We've also caught up with the major players in the Aussie VOD scene to check in on how the release of Netflix looks set to shake things up.

## Netflix

**PRICE:** \$8.99 for basic; \$11.99 for standard; \$14.99 for premium

**TOTAL LIBRARY SIZE:** estimated at 1120 titles

**LIBRARY LENGTH:** 5000 hours

■ Netflix is undoubtedly the biggest player in the world when it comes to streaming movies and TV shows. From its humble origins as a mail-out DVD service, it was one of the first companies to realise how popular distributing video over the Internet would be. The digital service launched eight years ago in the US, and is now so popular that some estimate it accounts for nearly 30% of all Internet traffic in the US. Aussies had to wait until March 2015 for the service to launch here, so how does it shape up in comparison to the US offering?

In a word, dismally. The biggest issue is of the size of the catalogue, which some have calculated is between 1/6th and 1/8th of the size of the US catalogue. Yet we're paying basically the same price as the US. Despite this, the state of VOD in Australia is so far behind the US that Netflix still stands out as one of the best offerings. It has a relatively strong catalogue, despite it being a shadow of its former self, thanks to the inclusion of Netflix's Original Series, such as the brilliant *House of Cards* and *Orange Is the New Black*. It's got by far the best interface of the bunch, with clever algorithms that figure out what you might like to watch based on your past viewing habits, and it's even possible to set up different user accounts to ensure these suggestions are tailored to each viewer.

One other benefit of Netflix is its tiered pricing structure. \$8.99 per month buys you a single stream in Standard Definition and

While the Australian launch of Netflix didn't feature a fraction of the content available through the American service, it still has a surprising amount of content available, especially when it comes to TV shows.

chews through around 1GB of data per hour. Bump it up to \$11.99 per month and you'll get two high-definition streams, each of which will happily devour up to 3GB per hour. Finally there is the cream of the crop product, at \$14.99 per month for four 4K ultra high-definition streams. Expect each super crisp stream to eat 7GB of data per hour. Thankfully two of our biggest ISPs are zero-rating Netflix content, Optus and iiNet (including iiNet subsidiaries) such as Internode.

Despite the service streaming the video from American servers, we've found the quality of the video and audio to be outstanding. This is especially true of the 4K streams, though you need 16Mbit/sec as a bare minimum to suck down such a high-quality stream.

## UNLOCKING NETFLIX'S POTENTIAL |

There is another benefit to Netflix launching in Australia, in that Aussies can now set up a local account and then use a VPN or IP-masking service to access the US store. If you're only going to be watching Netflix content on your PC, we highly recommend the use of Hola, a free plug-in that can be used to trick your browser into thinking it's running in the greatest country in the free world, the mighty U.S. of A. However, if you're going to be watching Netflix via your Smart TV or media streaming box, such as the AppleTV, your best bet is to pay for a service that masks your entire home network. We've been using [www.unblock-us.com](http://www.unblock-us.com) for several years now, and it costs just \$5 per month. When you consider this unlocks a seven-fold increase in Netflix content, it's a bit of a no-brainer. There are other ways to mask your home network that are free, but we've found none are as reliable as Unblock-US.



## Stan

**PRICE:** \$10 per month

**TOTAL LIBRARY SIZE:** estimated at 1250 titles

**LIBRARY LENGTH:** 7000 hours

■ Stan is one of the more recent VOD services to launch down under, and it's being backed by Fairfax Media and Channel 9 (in the interests of disclosure, the author of this article regularly contributes freelance copy to Fairfax). Rough estimates give Stan a substantially longer catalogue than Netflix, and it contains some big name exclusives. These include *Better Call Saul*, *Transparent*, *Community*, the James Bond library, *Fargo*, and *Breaking Bad*, which arguably tips the content catalogue verdict in favour of Stan over Netflix... provided you're not using a VPN to unlock Netflix's true potential, in which case there's no competition.

Another benefit of Stan is that one account delivers three streams, allowing three viewers in each house to use the service simultaneously. Also, users aren't charged extra to access the HD content. A standard def stream will cost you around 1GB per hour, while the HD streams take up to 3GB per hour. Unlike Netflix, which uses a variable bit rate based on your connection speed, it's possible to lock in the exact download speed of Stan, making it easier to calculate usage. This could be necessary for those with small data caps on their ISP plans, as Stan isn't zero-rated by any Australian ISPs.

Despite being one of the newest players on the Aussie VOD scene, we were impressed with the quality of Stan's interface and compatibility with a wide range of devices. It only just falls behind Netflix in this regard.

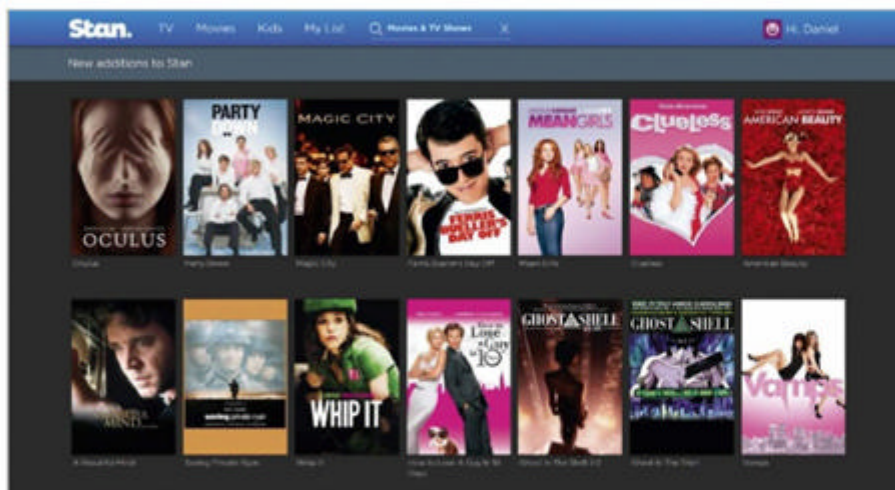
## Presto

**PRICE:** TV only for \$9.99 per month; movies only for \$9.99 per month; TV and Movies combined for \$14.99 per month

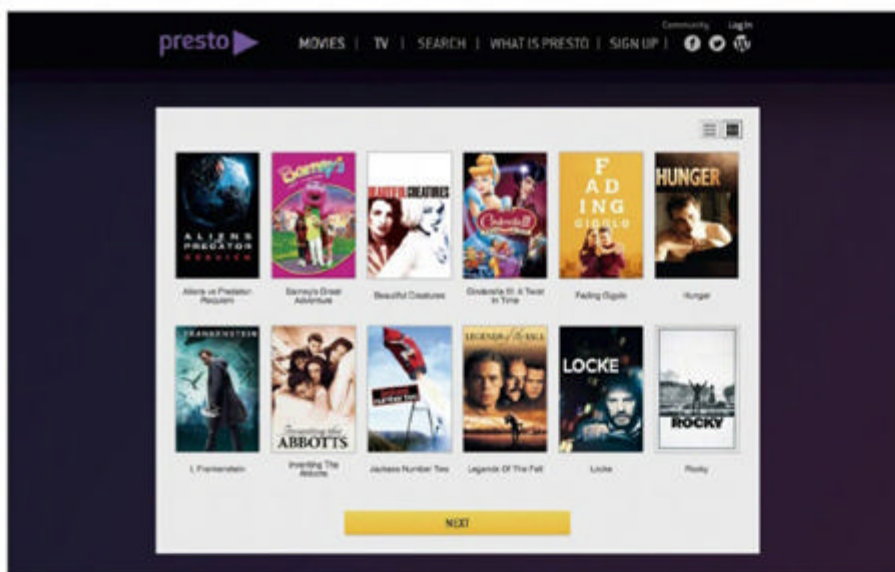
**TOTAL LIBRARY SIZE:** estimated at 1200 titles

**LIBRARY LENGTH:** 4500 hours

■ We knew Foxtel wasn't going to sit around and let the streamers steal its revenue stream, so its launch of Presto in January of 2015 wasn't a major surprise. With Foxtel having some of the biggest content deals tied up thanks to its subscription TV offering, it has the potential to deliver the most compelling content of all of the VOD-suppliers. Key to this is a deal with HBO, yet it will not be offering *Game of Thrones* to its customers. The logic here is simple – serious fans will continue to pay \$50 or more per month to access their favourite drama via Foxtel, and enabling it on Presto might eat into those sales. Yet we think it's mind-boggling to not capitalise on the huge torrent appetite Aussies have for the show –



Until Netflix improves their catalogue, Stan actually looks to be better value for money thanks to its great library of TV shows and classic films.



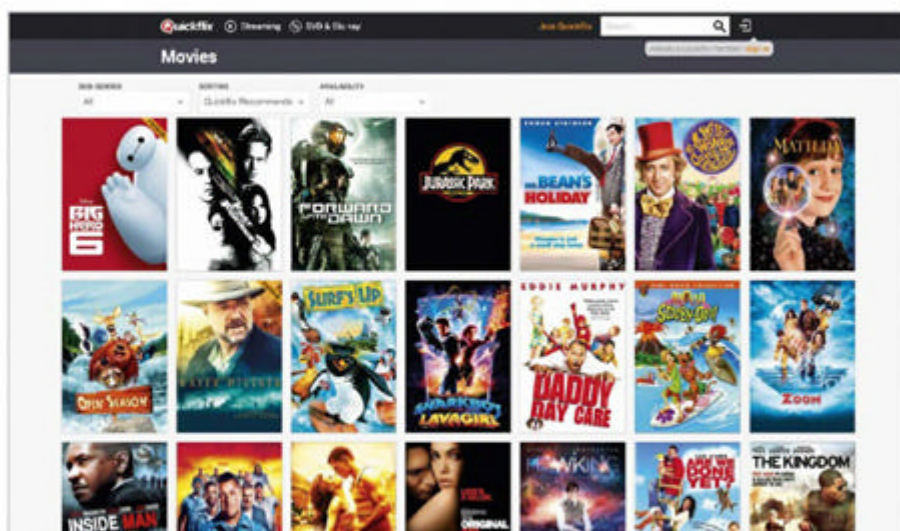
give them another way to watch it for just ten bucks per month and subscription numbers would grow exponentially. The service also has access to Foxtel original series, such as *Cloudstreet* and *Love My Way*.

Unfortunately Presto suffers from key technical issues. The website is far from intuitive, with sluggish performance that just gets worse on Smart TVs. Each account is limited to just two simultaneous streams, making it one of the most expensive offerings, and lovers of HD content will be dismayed to learn that the entire catalogue is only offered in the 1990's format of Standard Definition. Playing one of these streams on our 60" Plasma revealed obvious pixilation and artefacting. At least it's light on download needs as a result, requiring around 1.3GB per hour. If you're a Telstra Bigpond or Foxtel Broadband customer, this data is zero-rated.

Presto features a good selection of TV shows and films but sticks to an archaic model of having to buy a package instead of simply subscribing to the service. Content is only available in standard definition.

“the entire catalogue is only offered in the 1990's format of Standard Definition”





## Quickflix

**PRICE:** \$9.99 per month

**TOTAL LIBRARY SIZE:** estimated at 2300 titles

**LIBRARY LENGTH:** 7000 hours

Quickflix still offers good, old-fashioned DVD loans as well as its streaming service, adopting the same model of Netflix in the US. Unlike other services, it also allows viewers who aren't subscribed to the service to buy content in an ad-hoc fashion. It's not cheap to do so though, with each episode of HBO's hit series *Girls* going for a pricey \$2.99 per episode. An entire series of this show can be bought for \$27.99, which is quite competitive with buying the DVD box set. While the overall length of the catalogue is competitive, the actual quality of the shows within fails to match the likes of Stan or Netflix. Quickflix is quite the small player in the Aussie VOD scene, and it simply doesn't have the cash to gobble up content deals like the big fish. A quick glance at its new release movies page reveals the likes of *Teen Wolf* (the original!) and *The Shining* (again, the original!). The newest flick we could spot was *Halo Forward Unto Dawn*, highlighting just how far behind Quickflix is when it comes to streaming content. To get access to truly recent movies requires customers use the Premium Movie service, which charges around \$6 per film to rent flicks like *Whiplash* and *Big Hero 6*.

According to Stephen Langsford, Founder & CEO, Quickflix has the largest device support in Australia. "It has taken a large investment and a lot of work to roll streaming out to all the major brand SmartTVs, game consoles, mobile and tablets. This give us the largest device coverage of any streaming player in market."

For ten dollars a month, each account can run up to three simultaneous streams, and these come in both Standard Def and High Def flavours. Expect the former to eat 1.5GB of

Quickflix has the largest catalogue of any streaming service in the country at the moment, but it's also the most out of date.

data per hour, while the latter increases this to 2.5GB/hour. The interface is one of the worst on offer, unsurprising considering the service's age. Overall we'd have to say that Quickflix is going to struggle to compete against the big guys, unless it lifts its game in the near future, but Mr Langsford is optimistic about the company's future, saying that it aims to double its size. "In the last year we've seen our streaming customers and volumes take-off. We have some very exciting plans for adding more amazing TV and movie content, new technology to deploy including a brand new user interface and some great new partnerships."


## EzyFlix.tv

**PRICE:** rentals \$3.99+; download to own \$8.99+

**TOTAL LIBRARY SIZE:** estimated at 2000 titles

**LIBRARY LENGTH:** 6000 hours

EzyFlix.tv is unique in that it doesn't offer a subscription service – like iTunes, you'll need to pay for every piece of content. While this means that it has some of the latest content of every service, it's a much more expensive way of viewing it. Checking its latest movie offerings reveals the likes of *John Wick*, *Dracula Untold* and *The Hunger Games* part 1. Each of these will set you back \$7 to rent the High Def version, while SD versions can be purchased for around \$15. Craig White, CEO and co-founder of Access Digital Entertainment, the company behind EzyFlix.tv, believes this gives the company a leg-up when it comes to displaying new content. "Titles like *Big Hero 6* and *The Hobbit: Battle of the Five Armies* won't be available for years on Netflix but they are available to watch now on EzyFlix."

We don't have access to the bandwidth used by this service, but it's likely to be in line with other HD streaming services, up to around 3GB per hour. Currently no ISPs offer zero-rating of EzyFlix.tv content. While the interface is rather cluttered, selecting and viewing movies is a relatively simple affair. Mr White also pointed out a feature unique to EzyFlix.tv, saying "EzyFlix is the only service provider in Australia where you can locker your UltraViolet or Disney Digital Copy purchases, rent or buy digitally, or convert your DVD library to digital via our Disc to Digital program." Whether that is enough to give the service a competitive edge remains to be seen. 

EzyFlix has charges for each piece of content, giving it the most up to date but most expensive content of all the streaming services.





# PCPP ROUTER ROUNDUP

Dual-band versus Tri-band – FIGHT! **BENNETT RING** will be your referee.

I recently moved into a shiny new townhouse in Brunswick, Victoria. A key factor in choosing this suburb wasn't just the fact that there are 43 pubs and bars all within staggering distance – no, it was the knowledge that Brunswick is one of the few Australian suburbs to already have the full fibre-to-the-home NBN that the Libs seem so keen to destroy. So imagine my surprise when I moved into this brand new abode to discover the landlord hadn't bothered to install Ethernet, and it's a problem I bet many of you share. Without that thin blue cable tucked away in the walls of our abodes, we're limited to Wi-Fi. The latest crop of Wi-Fi routers provide more data throughput than ever before, so I grabbed the latest and greatest to see what they could do.

## TRI-BAND, LIE-BAND

Most new routers are known as Tri-band routers, with manufacturers claiming data speeds of up to 3200Mbit/sec. That's three times the speed of a Gigabit Ethernet, so it's no surprise to discover that these claims are utter bollocks. Rather than delivering that much bandwidth to a single device, Tri-band routers actually run three separate wireless networks; one in the slower 2.4GHz spectrum covering legacy 802.11 standards, along with twin high-speed 5GHz wireless networks for 802.11ac devices. The 5GHz networks deliver a maximum theoretical speed of 1300Mbit/sec, while the 2.4GHz is limited to 600Mbit/s. This is how manufacturers get

away with claiming 3200Mbit/sec, as there are twin 1300Mbit/sec networks as well as a single 600Mbit/sec. It's very disappointing to see that marketers think it's still ok to be so flippant with the truth, so buyer beware. Twin 5GHz networks are provided to ensure high performance when several devices are connected; if you're only going to have one or two 5GHz 802.11ac or n devices patched into the network, a Dual-band router will do you just fine. These have a single 5GHz

“It's disappointing to see that marketers think it's still ok to be so flippant with the truth”

channel instead of two, delivering a combined bandwidth of 1900Mbit/sec.

I should also point out that these performance figures are theoretical; the real world speeds aren't anywhere near those claimed in most instances. Chances are you'll have a wall or two between your router and certain devices, which dramatically drops performance. The 2.4GHz network is also bombarded by interference from microwaves, remote controls and other EMF generators, leading to even worse performance. As you'll

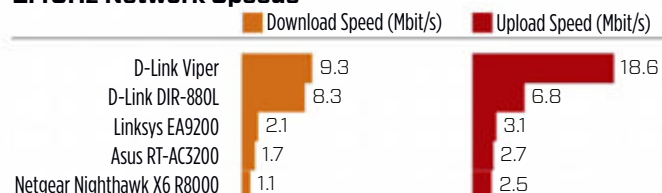
see in my tests, the real world speeds don't come close to Ethernet.

## HOW WE TESTED

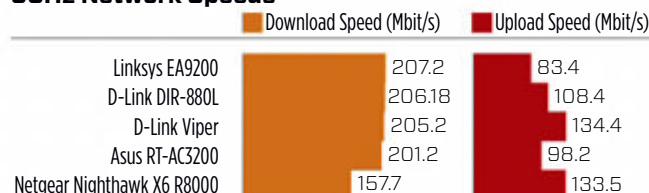
Each router was installed on the second floor of my townhouse, and then connected to a PC via Ethernet. This PC was tasked with running the Windows version of Wi-Fi Speed Test, a freeware application developed by Zoltán Pallagi and available for download at <https://pzoleeblog.wordpress.com/category/wifi-speed-test-2/>. This also has a free Android app, allowing me to use my Samsung Galaxy Note 3 to test performance on the third floor, which meant the signal had to travel a range of approximately 10 metres, through one concrete slab. This is a challenging situation for a router, but is by no means rare; most home routers will have to penetrate a wall or two, at even longer ranges. I left all router settings at default, with the exception of smart channel selection, a feature which allows certain routers to choose the best radio spectrum per device. This introduces major variability into the testing, so routers that supported this feature had it disabled. All routers were tested with the WPA2 Personal security setting, as this is the most commonly used in homes. Each upload and download speed test was run three times, with the average then calculated, as Wi-Fi networks are extremely prone to fluctuations. Read on to see which of the latest breed of Wi-Fi routers delivered the best speeds under these circumstances.

## ROUTER SPEED TESTS

### 2.4GHz Network Speeds



### 5GHz Network Speeds





# ASUS RT-AC3200

Let down by poor performance.

PRICE \$349  
www.asus.com.au



Bristling with more antennae than an Air Warfare Destroyer, with a whopping six in total, this is one seriously aggressive router. It's also one of the most expensive Tri-band routers around, and when combined with the fact that ASUS routers have historically performed well, my hopes were high indeed. Sadly it didn't turn in quite the roaring performance I expected, but it makes up for this lack in performance in other ways.

As with every router tested, it supports all of the common 802.11 standards, a/b/g/n and the newest, ac. It does so with a single 2.4GHz network, alongside twin 5GHz networks. ASUS is one of the few router manufacturers that employs automatic-network detection for connecting devices, cleverly selecting the appropriate network for each device based on its requirements. However, as mentioned earlier, I disabled this to isolate the 2.4GHz and 5GHz channels, which might explain why it didn't perform so well.

Four Gigabit Ethernet ports adorn the rear, alongside one USB 2.0 and one USB 3.0 port. These allow the connection of a printer for centralised printing duties. PCPP readers will probably prefer to fill these with external hard drives though, turning this into a basic NAS device. Setting up the device was a cinch, revealing the incredibly detailed interface. Network noobies will probably be overwhelmed

by the sheer amount of information, but more advanced users will lap it up. I especially liked the Traffic Analyser feature, which shows how much data each network device is using, and the programs that are chewing through the data. Port forwarding is easy to activate, with a maximum of 32 rules available.

Heading into the advanced Wireless settings reveals some of the most comprehensive Wi-Fi options we've seen on a consumer router, but most gamers won't need to touch anything here. Thankfully there's a much simpler Wi-Fi setup screen that makes setting the SSID, channels and WEP keys dead easy. The dual-core 1GHz processor within ensures that navigating the many menus is snappy and responsive. A feature unique to this router is its AiProtection, which monitors network traffic for signs of viruses, and it's nice to have that added layer of protection.

If only the network performance was as good as the rest of the router's features. It was the second slowest in both sets of tests, and not always by a close margin. Considering ASUS is charging top dollar for this router, I expected best-in-class performance. I'm sure better performance could be extracted from this router if I delved into the detailed wireless options, but most gamers just want to plug it in and play. In this regard the RT-AC3200 fails to deliver, no matter how good the rest of the features are.



The Traffic Analyser shows how much data is being used

- Virus protection
- Detailed setup options
- Looks bad-arse

• Relatively average performance compared to the rest

**VERDICT** Hopefully ASUS releases a firmware update that will bring this router's performance into line with the competition.

6



# D-Link DIR-880L

Dual-band at a nice price

PRICE \$199  
www.dlink.com.au

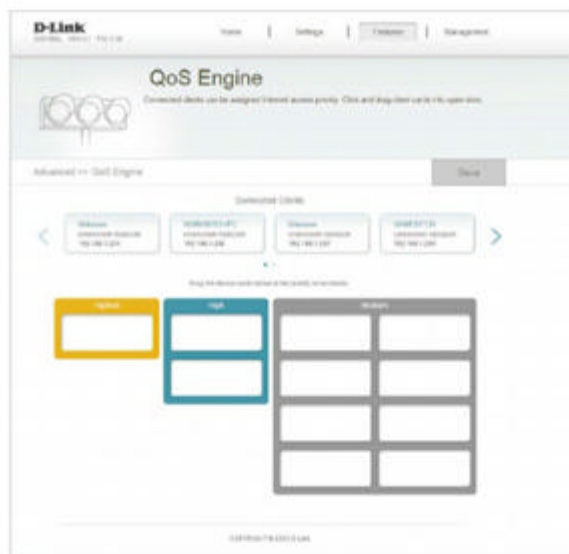


I bent the rules a little by including this router, as it's only a Dual-band beastie rather than a fully-fledged Tri-band behemoth. This means it only has a single 5GHz network alongside the 2.4GHz network, which is why it's marketed as a 1900Mbit/sec device (5GHz = 1300Mbit/sec + 2.4GHz = 600Mbit/sec). For many users this won't be a problem, as they may only have a couple of devices that can make use of the faster 802.11n or ac standards, and the cost saving is dramatic. But given that this is a slightly older product, does it have the oomph necessary to keep up with the latest Tri-band devices?

This router comes with three antennae, and they're all detachable for those who'd like to try add-on antennae, which can boost the signal range and strength. As expected for a modern router, the usual four Gigabit Ethernet ports are on the rear, along with a single WAN connection for your ADSL, Cable or Fibre modem. Two USB ports are included, one 2.0 with the other 3.0, allowing the connection of a centralised printer or hard drive, though the hard drive can only be 250GB in size. D-Link's SharePort allows remote access to files on devices connected to the router, but most routers deliver the same functionality under another name. The mydlink Lite app lets owners monitor the router's activity via their smartphone, and even block clients that shouldn't be connected.

Like the Viper, the DIR-880L is blessed with D-link's sexy new interface. It's unquestionably one of the easiest to use on the market, with only the most essential settings exposed to the user. It's possible to drill down deeper into more advanced settings, but in this regard it doesn't come close to the configurability of the Asus RT-AC3200. Network novices will find it perfect though, with a very clean layout that is self-explanatory. I especially like the Quality of Service (QoS) screen, which uses a simple drag and drop design to prioritise network clients. However, this router bases its QoS on devices rather than traffic type; in a home with multiple gaming machines this means one PC will get priority over the others. The number of available Port Forward rules is also limiting, offering just 16 in total. Just a single game can chew up three or four rules, though thankfully most recent games don't require Port Forwarding.

Given the low price of this device, I was pleasantly surprised by the excellent performance that it turned in during the benchmarks. It posted the second fastest result in the 2.4GHz range, while falling just behind the blazing Viper in the 5GHz upload speed test. I should remind you that this is with only one device connected to the 5GHz network; throw in a few more clients and Tri-band routers will romp it in. However, if you only plan on using one or two high-speed devices, the DIR-880L delivers excellent performance at a very nice price.



The drag and drop QoS screen allow the easy prioritisation of network clients

- Great performance
- Beautiful UI
- Very affordable

- Only dual-band
- Limited advanced setup options

**VERDICT** If you're not running a bunch of 5GHz compatible devices, the DIR-880L will happily deliver blistering performance all day long.





# D-Link Viper DSL-2900

Blistering performance, great design

PRICE \$299  
www.dlink.com.au



With D-Link's Dual-band baby impressing me so much, I was rather excited to see what its latest product could do. Gazing at the high price tag, I immediately assumed this was a Tri-band router, but it turns out I was wrong. D-Link is charging Tri-band prices for this Dual-band router, so it had better deliver some outstanding results to justify the price hike. Thankfully, it does.

Before I delve into the performance results, let's just take a look at the very unique design of this product. Looking a little like a toilet roll holder, this black tower of Wi-Fi goodness doesn't have an ugly antenna sticking out from every orifice. Which begs the question as to how it can perform so well compared to those with exterior antennae? It turns out that D-Link has managed to squeeze six antennae inside the case, yet the cylindrical design has a tiny desk footprint, something worth considering if your desk space is more crowded than Sydney's inner-city suburbs. Compared to the slab that is the ASUS RT-AC3200, the Viper is positively dainty. The router includes an ADSL2+ modem within, which goes some way to justifying the higher price tag.

As expected, the usual four Gigabit Ethernet ports adorn the rear, alongside the ubiquitous USB 2.0 and 3.0 ports. You guessed it, these can be used for both printer and external storage duties. There's no fifth Ethernet port for a WAN device though, as the internal

modem takes care of that. The same remote monitoring and accessibility features found on the cheaper DIR-880L are present here, in the form of the mydlink Shareport and Lite. It also features an identical user interface, built around D-Link's recently refreshed design. I can't overstate just how easy this is to navigate, and it made setting up the Viper an absolute delight.

Keeping track of which devices are connected to the router is a breeze thanks to the easy-to-read homepage, so discovering unwanted guests should be a cinch. On the flipside, this router lacks the advanced features found on more professional routers, with just the very basics of Wi-Fi configuration available. One improvement over its cheaper sibling is a doubling of the number of Port Forwarding rules, with a maximum of 32.

Enough about the fluff though – let's get to what really matters, performance. As the benchmarks attest, the Viper is a speed-demon. Its upload speed in the 2.4GHz network was between three times and nine times as fast as the competition, and download speed increases were similar. Performance in the 5GHz was similarly impressive, with the top upload speed.

Whether the Viper is the router for you comes down to whether you need Tri-band support for multiple high-speed devices. If you don't, and can handle the Viper's price tag, then you're looking at one of the fastest routers around.



Homepage lets you see connected devices and uncover unwanted leeches

- Blistering performance
- Great design
- Perfect UI

- Only dual-band
- Rather expensive

**VERDICT** Despite only being a dual-band device, the high speeds of this router help offset the wallet-bruising price tag.





# Linksys EA9200

Don't pay through the nose

PRICE \$398  
www.linksys.com



Before you spurt coffee all over the magazine after gazing at the price tag of this router, I should point out that at the time of print I only had access to the EA9200's Recommended Retail Price. Every other router's price tag is the street price, and there's usually a substantial difference between the two; you can expect the EA9200 to fetch somewhere around \$350 when it does show up in stores. Is it worth it?

Thankfully this is a true Tri-band router, so it'll lap up your extra devices with ease, which helps explain the heady price-tag. Three external antennae extend from the top of the unit, and it utilises the same business-like exterior we've seen Linksys use for several years. Despite its large size, the router stands upright, so won't devour a huge chunk of your desk real estate.

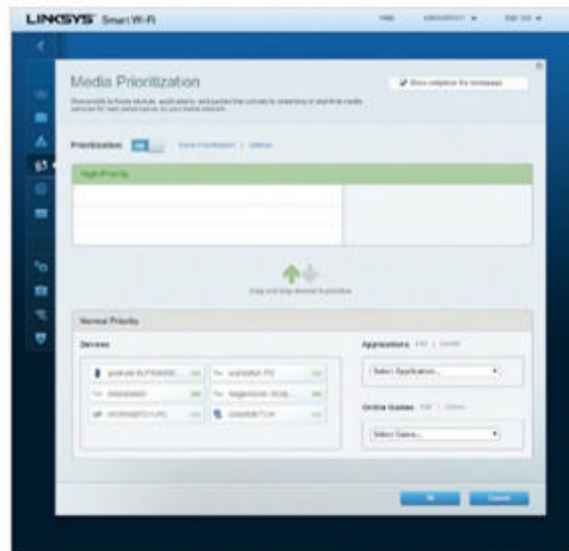
Like the ASUS router, the EA9200 utilises a feature called Smart Connect, that will automatically place any connecting device onto the least congested network. It's also packing a dual-core 1GHz processor, ensuring the interface loads quickly. It's worth noting that the URL used to access the web interface didn't work for me; instead I had to Google the unit's default IP to log in. Four Gigabit Ethernet ports and a single WAN port can be found on the rear next to the USB 2.0 and 3.0 ports.

Heading into the interface reveals a relatively intuitive interface, albeit one that isn't quite as nice as D-Link's. The main network map is a nice touch, as it

displays each connected device which can then be clicked on, opening up the option to enable parental controls by device. Rather than the usual Quality of Service screen, this router features a Media Prioritisation option. From here the user can drag and drop clients, services or applications into the High priority list, but it's limited to only three high priority items. A built in Internet Speed Test is included, but it didn't work in my setup as I didn't have the fibre modem directly connected to the Router. Port Forwarding is easy to configure, but Linksys doesn't advise what the maximum number of forwarded ports can be. Serious network engineers will find the lack of detailed Wi-Fi options a turn-off.

Given the rather high price, I expected this router to blaze through the benchmarks. Alas, it wasn't to be. It landed smack bang in the middle of the pack when testing the 2.4GHz network, yet scored the top download speed in the 5GHz range, albeit by a tiny margin. This was offset by the poor 5GHz upload speed, recording the worst of every device in the roundup.

It would appear that Tri-band routers have some way to go to catch up to the performance of Dual-band models, and the Linksys EA9200 is just another example showing how far behind they are. However, it's worth noting that this is the fastest of the Tri-band routers on offer, so if you're packing plenty of 5GHz devices, could be worth considering.



Media Prioritisation allows you to drag and drop clients, services and apps

- Fastest Tri-band performance
- Solid interface

- Very expensive
- Slower than dual-band

**VERDICT** It might be the fastest Tri-band performer in the roundup, but it's still a long way behind D-Link's Dual-band routers.

7



# Netgear Nighthawk X6 R8000

The original is no longer the best

PRICE \$290  
www.netgear.com.au



Releasing in the middle of 2014, the Nighthawk set tongues wagging with its dramatic looks and even more dramatic price tag. Thankfully it's now much more affordable than at launch, making it one of the least expensive Tri-band routers, but performance has also suffered as a result of its age.

Looking like some kind of bizarre robotic insect on its back, the six antennae fold outwards from the lid. They can be adjusted to point at a certain angle, but not in different directions. It's got a massive footprint, unless you choose to hang it from a nearby wall or inside your cupboard, but given the performance issues I wouldn't suggest the latter.

The usual array of ports can be found on the rear: four Ethernet, one WAN, and one each of the USB 2.0 and 3.0 flavours. The inclusion of ReadyShare Vault PC software is a nice touch, as it allows the use of an external hard drive as an automated backup destination. A dual core 1GHz processor handles all of the heavy lifting. Heading into the User Interface reveals one of the uglier menu systems around, with a very text heavy focus that isn't very intuitive to navigate. Compared to the drag and drop, hyperlinked menus of the other routers, it's apparent that Netgear has some catching up to do in the design department. Advanced Wi-Fi configuration options are extremely

lacking, though the same could be said of most of these routers with the exception of the ASUS.

Setting up this router proved to be harder than it should have been, as the web-based URL mentioned in the instructions didn't work. Once again I had to hit up Google to find the default IP of 192.168.1.1 to access the setup screens. Heading into the Quality of Service area revealed a total lack of configuration options; you simply turn it on and trust that the router knows what it's doing. One area of note is the NETGEAR Genie software, which makes remotely accessing files connected to the router a breeze, even via smartphone or tablet.

During the benchmarking, I unfortunately encountered several disconnection issues with the 2.4GHz network, putting paid to Netgear's claims that this router is perfect for "very large homes". When it did eventually stop disconnecting, the performance figures put it right at the bottom of the pile, in both sets of benchmarks.

With lacklustre performance, a rather unwelcoming interface and a relatively high price tag, the Nighthawk X6 R8000 simply fails to excite.

BENNETT RING



The ugly interface and lack of configuration options are telling

- NETGEAR Genie app is handy
- Cheapest Tri-band router

- Horrible interface
- Disconnection issues
- Poor performance

**VERDICT** It might have been the bee's knees when it released mid-2014, but this router has since been superseded by more modern routers.

6



# LG 34UM67 FreeSync Display

AMD's FreeSync kills G-Sync

PRICE \$999  
www.lg.com/au



NVIDIA's G-Sync technology launched to much acclaim back in October of 2013, but it took much longer for working monitors with this technology to arrive. The idea behind the tech was solid. Rather than monitors and GPUs operating at different refresh rates, leading to problems with frame tearing (V-Sync off) and stuttering or latency (V-Sync on), G-Sync slaved the monitor's refresh rate to the GPU's outputted frames. This removed all of the problems caused by V-Sync, and also allowed for silky smooth motion at framerates of around 40fps and above. There was one issue though; it required a proprietary scaler inside the monitor to work, and this caused G-Sync monitors to be much more expensive than their V-Sync cousins, with a price premium of \$250 or more. As a result we haven't seen many G-Sync displays hit the market, with just a handful on sale today.

AMD's answer to G-Sync is FreeSync, which it developed in conjunction with the VESA group, the body responsible for display standards. Unlike G-Sync, it's an open, royalty-free technology, which means it shouldn't add much to the price of the displays it's used in. It seems to operate basically identically to G-Sync, except that it doesn't require a proprietary scaler. Instead, the major scaler suppliers (Realtek, Novatek, and MStar) have all built FreeSync into their latest scalers, which are now being used by the likes of Acer,

BenQ, LG and Samsung. This helps to explain while we'll see eleven FreeSync displays in the coming months, almost double the number compared to G-Sync.

There is one major difference with the first implementation of FreeSync though – it only operates down to the minimum refresh rate offered by the monitor. In the case of the LG 34UM67 display we're reviewing here, that's 48Hz. Below this, the monitor kicks into V-Sync on or off, depending on which setting the user selects. G-Sync does not have this issue, as it has no bottom fps limit. This is

**“it only operates down to the minimum refresh rate offered by the monitor”**

important to note, as more demanding games will often dip down to 40fps or so, and in this situation G-Sync displays silky smooth motion while FreeSync caps the screen's refresh rate at 40Hz (or fps), which leads to even worse stuttering than if standard V-Sync was disabled. It's only an issue when games drop below the monitor's minimum frame rate, but it could be a biggie for those with less powerful GPUs. Thankfully it's only a limitation of the display's minimum refresh rate, and there are

several FreeSync displays already available with a 40Hz refresh rate.

FreeSync currently only works with AMD products that feature the GCN 1.1 architecture, which means it's limited to the R7 260/260X, R9 285, and R9 290/290X/295X2 products. Sadly owners of the excellent value for money R9 280/280X will miss out on it, as this uses GCN 1.0. Kaveri APUs are also supported, which includes the A6-7400K, A8-7600/7650K, and A10-7700K/7800/7850K processors. It also only works when using a DisplayPort 1.2 cable, as it's part of the Adaptive Sync standard supported by this connection type. NVIDIA products aren't compatible with FreeSync, but the fact that it's an open standard means the company is free to implement support. Given the high cost to develop G-Sync, we doubt NVIDIA will do it in the near future, but will likely jump on board once FreeSync's dominance is proven.

The first FreeSync product to cross PC PowerPlay's desk is LG's new 34UM67 Ultra-Wide display. It's a 34 inch whopper, using the 21:9 aspect ratio to fill more of the user's field of view. Based on an IPS panel, it has excellent viewing angle performance, which is extremely important for Ultra-Wide displays. Past models would exhibit colour shifting towards the edges of the screen, but the IPS panel used here ensures this problem is no longer applicable. Before we dig into the image quality, let's take





a look at the exterior.

To be frank, we hate the stand on this monitor. It's one of those fixed jobbies that can't be adjusted, which is simply useless for customising the monitor's position to best match your gaming environment. The default position is ok, but LG needs to start equipping its displays with the highly adjustable stands found elsewhere. The screen uses a frameless design, which means the glass covering the panel stretches all the way to the edge, with a one millimetre bezel around this, with the exception of the bottom bezel which is around 12mm thick. Accessing the On Screen Display (OSD) is done via a small joystick, and this opens up a decent range of colour tuning options.

Using the image quality tests at lagom.nl, we found the gamma and colour reproduction to be spot on. It also performed ably in the white and black saturation tests. Firing up some Battlefield with an R9 290 to test for motion blur, we noticed a small amount until we enabled the gaming mode, which delivers a grey to grey pixel response time of just 5ms. Enabling FreeSync saw silky smooth performance at variable

framerates, without any stuttering or mouse lag – basically identical to G-Sync. However, when the performance dropped below 48fps on the Dust Bowl map, things weren't quite so rosy, with much frame tearing (we had it set to disable V-Sync below 48fps).

There is one final issue regarding image quality. The screen's resolution is just 2560 x 1080, which isn't as high as other recent 21:9 34 inch panels we've tested, such as the Philips BDM3470, which is of the same size but packs in 3440 x 1440 pixels. The Philips is also the same price, but doesn't include FreeSync. As a result, the LG display had more obvious pixilation than the Philips.

While this is an interesting first step for FreeSync, the low resolution at this price and minimum supported refresh rate of 48Hz make it a difficult product to recommend. We'd suggest holding off for now, until more FreeSync panels arrive with lower refresh rates and more competitive pricing. **BENNETT RING** 🇬🇧



- FreeSync is great above 48fps
- Nice colour and image quality

- FreeSync doesn't work below 48fps
- Low resolution for the price

**VERDICT** FreeSync definitely has plenty of promise, but this panel is overpriced and underspec'ed to make it a must-have.

**6**



## 1. Pioneer DDJ-SZ Gold Edition

Price: \$2000 • Distributor: Pioneer

[pioneerdj.com](http://pioneerdj.com)

If you fancy yourself becoming a disc-jockey maestro of the local discotech, you probably need some professional hardware, and nothing says “professional” in the music biz, like gold bling.

**POWERED UP:** Combined with Serato DJ software, this controller with two 24-bit soundcards, four-channel mixer, two mic inputs, two master out ports (and a host of other in/out options) can suit a range of PA/Mixing/Noisemaking roles.

**PLAYED OUT:** Only 1000 units available in gold. Then you’ll have to buy boring old black.

## 2. Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge

Price: \$Flagship-phone-price • Distributor:

Samsung

[www.samsung.com/au](http://www.samsung.com/au)

It wasn’t that long ago that an octocore (ALL HAIL THE OCTOCORE) CPU in a PC was a luxury item, and now, it seems, it is the new standard for phones.

**POWERED UP:** Sweet curved display with innovative interactivity along the edge portion of the display. OCTOCORE.

**PLAYED OUT:** Milk Music. We’re not making this phrase up, it’s an actual thing invented by someone, and available on this phone. Why would you call a music streaming service “Milk Music”? You don’t grab a music service by the teat and pull down with a squeezing motion, but thanks for cyber-flesh-hell nightmare, Samsung.

## 3. Apple Watch

Price: \$500+ • Distributor: Apple

[www.apple.com/watch](http://www.apple.com/watch)

Sigh. Let’s get this over with.

**POWERED UP:** It’s new! It’s shiny! It’s Apple’s take on a thing that’s already been out for ages, and you didn’t want, but now you do because this one has Apple associated with it! It’s not called “iWatch”! Get one with a gold case at up to \$24000 because you burn money in a fireplace for heat!

**PLAYED OUT:** 18 hours of “all day” battery. This is a timepiece that can’t keep time for an entire day without charging. Let that sink in.

## 4. NVIDIA Shield Android TV Console

Price: \$300+ • Distributor: NVIDIA

[shield.nvidia.com](http://shield.nvidia.com)

Kind of like an Ouya on ‘roids.

**POWERED UP:** Streaming games from the cloud with a Tegra X1 processor and 3GB memory! It’s 4K ready, too which will be great when 4K content arrives.

**PLAYED OUT:** Is anyone using their Ouya? Cloud gaming services have been around a little while now, and they aren’t exactly mainstream. Even less-mainstream here in Australia, where our Internet is... not so great. You may have noticed. So the 30MB/s down requirement puts this out of reach of a lot of the country already.

## 5. Xoo Belt

Price: \$200 • Distributor: Xoo

[xoo.co](http://xoo.co)

Being tethered to technology has a downside, and that downside is power. We need it. All the time. And with that need comes a range of options which usually amounts to carrying more stuff around.

**POWERED UP:** This integrates a 2100mAh chargeable, flexible, lithium ceramic polymer battery pack into the buckle of a belt -something you may be wearing already! You just need the correct adapter cable for your device (lightning, for iPhone 6 and micro-USB for pretty much everything else under the sun).

**PLAYED OUT:** Certainly not a cheap belt, but how do you price convenience?





# PC PowerPlay

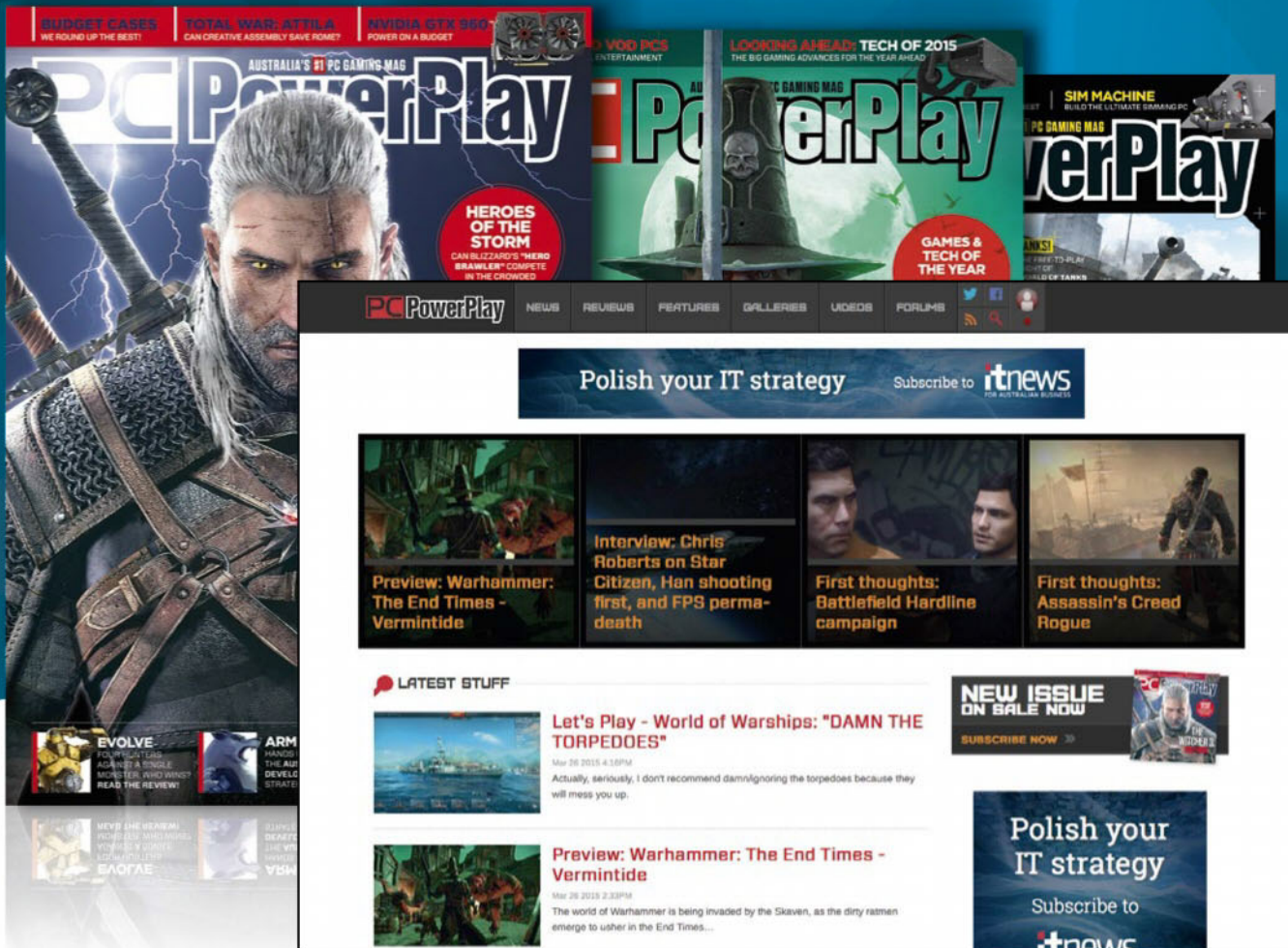
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# MENAGERIE

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## BUDGET

The perfect entry-level gaming PC

### CPU

**AMD FX-4300 4 Core Black Edition**

**\$118** [www.amd.com](http://www.amd.com)  
We're sticking with AMD's budget beauty.



### MOBO

**ASRock 980DE3/U3S3 AM3+**

**\$69** [www.asrock.com.au](http://www.asrock.com.au)  
Our CPU needs a new ASRock home.



### RAM

**GeIL 8GB Kit DDR3 Evo Veloce C9 1600MHz**

**\$85** [www.geil.com.tw](http://www.geil.com.tw)  
In with the cheapest we can find



### VIDEO

**Sapphire Radeon R9 280X**

**\$325** [www.sapphiretech.com](http://www.sapphiretech.com)  
Enjoy 1080p performance with all the options



### POWER

**Cooler Master Thunder 500W**

**\$66** [www.coolermaster.com](http://www.coolermaster.com)  
The budget beast doesn't need a lot of juice



### SOUND

**Sennheiser HD201 + ASUS Xonar DG**

**\$56** [www.sennheiser.com](http://www.sennheiser.com)  
Headphones plus soundcard - yes!



### OPTICAL

**Lite-on DVD-RW**

**\$21** [www.us.liteonit.com](http://www.us.liteonit.com)  
We'd happily retire the drive, but some of you guys still believe in physical media.



### STORAGE

**Toshiba DT01ACA050 500GB HDD**

**\$55** [www.toshiba.com.au](http://www.toshiba.com.au)  
Half a Terabyte should handle everything.



### DISPLAY

**Samsung 24" S24D300H**

**\$165** [www.samsung.com](http://www.samsung.com)  
Crystal clear 1920 x 1080 res gaming



### CASE

**BitFenix Shinobi**

**\$71** [www.bitfenix.com](http://www.bitfenix.com)  
Nice for the price. This is the little brother of the case used in our Performance build.



### KEYBOARD

**Tt eSPORTS Challenger**

**\$45** [www.thermaltake.com.au](http://www.thermaltake.com.au)  
Built for PC gamers. Macros, shortcuts, the lot.



### MOUSE

**Gigabyte M6900**

**\$22** [www.gigabyte.com.au](http://www.gigabyte.com.au)  
A sensor resolution of 3200DPI will make your headshots count.



**TOTAL - \$1,098**

## PERFORMANCE

Most of the bells and whistles, without breaking the bank

### CPU

**Intel 4th Generation Core i5-4670K + Cooler Master Hyper 612 PWM**

**\$263 + \$52** [www.intel.com](http://www.intel.com)



### MOBO

**ASRock Z97M Anniversary**

**\$119** [www.asrock.com](http://www.asrock.com)  
Around half the price of Z97 boards.



### RAM

**GeIL 8GB Kit DDR3 Evo Veloce C9 1600MHz**

**\$85** [www.geil.com.tw](http://www.geil.com.tw)  
In with the cheapest we can find



### VIDEO

**Galaxy GTX970-4GD5**

**\$435** [www.galaxytechus.com](http://www.galaxytechus.com)  
NVIDIA's mid-range card is perfect



### POWER

**Corsair VS650**

**\$81** [www.corsair.com](http://www.corsair.com)  
This affordable PSU delivers a clean and reliable source of energy.



### SOUND

**Audio Technica ATH-A500X**

**\$186** [www.audio-technica.com](http://www.audio-technica.com)  
w/ASUS Xonar DG



### OPTICAL

**Lite-on DVD-RW**

**\$21** [www.us.liteonit.com](http://www.us.liteonit.com)  
This is the one bit of kit that stays the same between most of our machines.



### STORAGE

**W.D. Caviar Black 1TB + Samsung 850 EVO 250GB**

**\$95 + \$175** [www.wdc.com/](http://www.wdc.com/) [www.samsung.com.au](http://www.samsung.com.au)



### DISPLAY

**BenQ XL2411T**

**\$369** [www.benq.com.au](http://www.benq.com.au)  
BenQ's 24-inch not only looks great, it'll also save your eyesight with a 144Hz refresh rate.



### CASE

**Fractal Design Define R5**

**\$150** [www.fractal-design.com](http://www.fractal-design.com)  
Our new favourite mid-tower.



### KEYBOARD

**Logitech G710+**

**\$139** [www.thermaltake.com.au](http://www.thermaltake.com.au)  
Logi's new mechanical board is one for them to beat.



### MOUSE

**Logitech G502 Proteus**

**\$55** [www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)  
Deadly accurate and super comfortable.



**TOTAL - \$2,225**

## PREMIUM

Crank everything to Ultra, including your credit card limit

### CPU

**Intel 4th Generation Core i7-4790K + Corsair H110 Water Cooling Kit**

**\$425 + \$169** [www.intel.com](http://www.intel.com)



### MOBO

**ASUS Maximus VII Ranger**

**\$229** [www.asus.com.au](http://www.asus.com.au)  
One of our favourite Z97 boards



### RAM

**GeIL 8GB Kit DDR3 Evo Veloce C9 1600MHz**

**\$85** [www.geil.com.tw](http://www.geil.com.tw)  
In with the cheapest we can find



### VIDEO

**2 X Gigabyte GV-N980WF30C-4GD GeForce GTX 980 4GB**

**\$1478** [www.gigabyte.com.au](http://www.gigabyte.com.au)



### POWER

**Corsair HX1000i**

**\$289** [www.corsair.com](http://www.corsair.com)  
A high end PSU to ensure stable overlocks.



### SOUND

**Audio Technica ATH-ADG1 headphones**

**\$279** [audio-technica.com](http://audio-technica.com)  
We've ditched the soundcard



### OPTICAL

**Pioneer Optical Disc Drive (ODD) Internal Blu-ray Combo Drive**

**\$59** [www.pioneer.com.au](http://www.pioneer.com.au)



### STORAGE

**W.D. Caviar Black 1TB + Samsung SSD 850 EVO 500GB**

**\$100 + \$318** [www.wdc.com/](http://www.wdc.com/) [www.samsung.com.au](http://www.samsung.com.au)



### DISPLAY

**ASUS PB278Q 27"**

**\$599** [www.asus.com.au](http://www.asus.com.au)  
This huge monitor delivers pixel-perfect 2560 x 1440 resolution, at a fantastic price.



### CASE

**NZXT Switch 810 Full Tower**

**\$220** [www.nzxt.com](http://www.nzxt.com)  
It's big, it's beautiful, and it's also nice and quiet.



### KEYBOARD

**Corsair K70 RGB**

**\$229** [www.corsair.com](http://www.corsair.com)  
This is PCPP's favourite keyboard, case closed.



### MOUSE

**Logitech G502 Proteus**

**\$69** [www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)  
Deadly accurate and super comfortable.



**TOTAL - \$4,538**



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# THE BEAST

When overkill is barely enough...



## CPU

**Intel 4th Generation Core i7 4790K + XSPC RayStorm D5 RX240 V3 Water Cooling Kit**

**\$425 + \$587**  
[www.intel.com](http://www.intel.com)  
[www.pccasegear.com.au](http://www.pccasegear.com.au)



## HEADPHONES + SOUND CARD

**Audio Technica ATH-ADG1 headphones**

**\$279**  
[www.audio-technica.com](http://www.audio-technica.com)  
 The onboard Creative audio will power these amazing headphones with ease.



## MOBO

**Gigabyte Z97X Gaming G1 WiFi Black Edition**

**\$479** [www.gigabyte.com.au](http://www.gigabyte.com.au)  
 This high end Z97-based board has plenty of room for more GPUs when you decide to upgrade, and it's chock full of extras



## STORAGE

**2 x Samsung SSD 850 EVO 1TB, 3 x WD 1TB Velociraptor**

**\$1060 + \$717**  
[www.wdc.com](http://www.wdc.com)  
[www.samsung.com](http://www.samsung.com)



## RAM

**Corsair Dominator Platinum 4 x 4GB DDR3 2400MHz**

**\$352** [www.corsair.com](http://www.corsair.com)  
 It doesn't get much faster than this.



## DISPLAY

**Epson TW9200W**

**\$3800**  
[www.epson.com.au](http://www.epson.com.au)  
 Beautiful 1920 x 1080 gaming. Unfortunately you won't be able to do 3D gaming at anything higher than 720p due to the limitations of HDMI 1.4.



## VIDEO

**3 x Asus STRIX Geforce GTX 980 4GB**

**\$2607** [www.asus.com.au](http://www.asus.com.au)  
 Welcome to crazy town, population 200fps.



## CASE

**Cooler Master Cosmos II Ultra Tower**

**\$379**  
[www.coolermaster.com](http://www.coolermaster.com)  
 It's big, it's beautiful, and it's also nice and quiet. The compartmentalised interior ensures everything runs ice-cool.



## POWER

**Silverstone 1500wST1500 Strider**

**\$329** [www.silverstone.com](http://www.silverstone.com)  
 1500W should be plenty for the three GPUs running alongside an overclocked CPU, as well as the storage within.



## INPUT DEVICES

**Logitech G502 Proteus + Xbox 360 USB Wireless Dongle + Xbox 360 wireless controller**

**\$69 + \$40 + \$40**  
[www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)



## KEYBOARD

**Corsair K70 RGB**

**\$229**  
[www.corsair.com](http://www.corsair.com)  
 This is PCPP's favourite keyboard, case closed.



## STEERING WHEEL

**Fanatec ClubSport Wheel base, Formula Carbon and CSP v2 Pedals**

**\$589 + \$239 + \$329** [www.fanatec.de](http://www.fanatec.de)  
 There's nothing better than "Germengineering" to deliver the most precise force feedback around.



## SPEAKERS

**Paradigm Cinema 110 with dual subwoofers and Paradigm monitor center channel + Pioneer VSX-921 amp**

**\$3299**  
[www.eastwoodhifi.com.au](http://www.eastwoodhifi.com.au)



## JOYSTICK

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# Welcome to Upgrade Australia

THE INAUGURAL UPGRADE AUSTRALIA EVENT WENT OFF WITH A BANG! HOPEFULLY, IT'S JUST THE FIRST OF MANY MORE TO COME.

Upgrade Australia, our first cross-brand event celebrating PC & Tech Authority, PC PowerPlay, Hyper, and Atomic, has been and gone, and it was a great night.

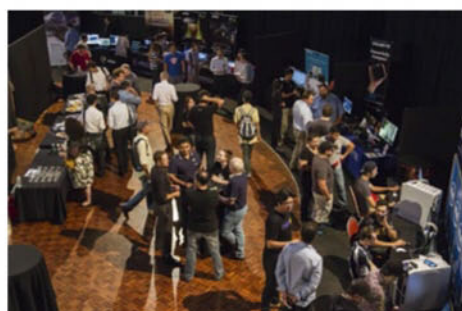
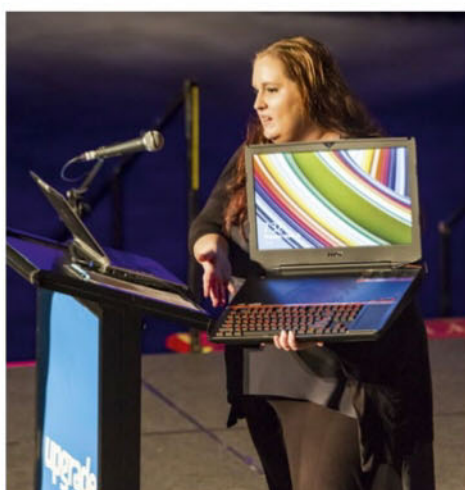
We took over the stage at UNSW's Roundhouse, and invited along some of our favourite partners to share a night of tech, talks, hang-outs, and deep-dives into the latest and greatest PC hardware.

We had MSI showing off some really

versatile laptops, Synology sharing its secrets to clever cloud storage in the home or office, and SteelSeries talking us through its great range of gaming peripherals. Our old friend Dino was on hand to catch us up on GIGABYTE's latest, and Intel - a major supporter of the event, had three fantastic speakers, including local Technical Manager Graham Tucker, talking via a pre-recorded interview, about NUC's, Compute Sticks, Windows 10, and much more.

Not only was information being handed out left and right, but there were prizes, too! Great goodie-bags from Intel, and a sexy new 4790K CPU for one lucky attendee. Synology had two of their NAS devices to give away, while SteelSeries and MSI had a mess of mice, keyboards, and headsets. Not to be left out, GIGABYTE gave away a couple of its gaming motherboards.

There was food, drink, and much merriment!









# PC PowerPlay COMPS

AUSTRALIA'S #1 PC GAMING MAG

Welcome to the PCPP competitions page! With the office positively overflowing in PC gaming goodies, it's become so difficult to do our ridiculously awesome jobs that we decided to pass the savings onto you. And by savings, we mean free stuff. Games, collectibles, swag, and all kinds of media that screams PC gaming. Or perhaps those are the screams of the intern trapped under the boxes of giveaways. Only one way to save them:

Head to **[www.pcpowerplay.com.au](http://www.pcpowerplay.com.au)** to enter!

To find the competitions, simply mouse over the "Community" tab in the main menu at the top of the homepage, and click on "Competitions". Click through to each individual competition page, fill out the form (be sure to agree to the terms and conditions) and you'll be in the running to win! Keep an eye out for this page in future issues of PCPP, as we roll out new competitions every month!

**WIN**



## Wild Card

Jason Statham, one of the arse-kickingest action heroes around returns to the screen as Nick Wild, a Las Vegas bodyguard with incredible powers of arse-kicking. When one of Nick's friends has his arse savagely kicked, he takes revenge in a whirlwind of arse-kicking, only to discover one of the kickees is in fact the son of a mob boss. Much arse-kicking ensues. As an added bonus, the film was written by William Goldman of The Princess Bride fame. How good is that?

TO ENTER:

Head to **[www.pcpowerplay.com.au](http://www.pcpowerplay.com.au)**  
In 25 words or less, answer the following question:

▶ **Whose arse should Jason Statham kick?**

**10**

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## Spirited Away and The Tale of the Princess Kaguya

Studio Ghibli are renowned for creating beautiful, uplifting films. Thanks to the good people at Madman we have five BD prize packs comprising two of Studio Ghibli's most beloved modern films, the 2001 classic Spirited Away and the gorgeous, painterly 2013 masterpiece, The Tale of the Princess Kaguya. Don't let the child protagonists and dreamy visuals fool you – these are wonderful films for children and adults alike.

TO ENTER:

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In 25 words or less, answer the following question:

▶ **What is Studio Ghibli's greatest film and why?**

**5**

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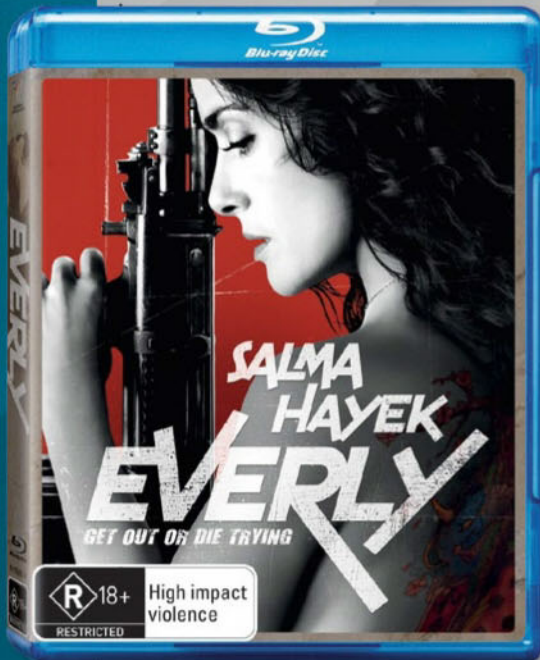
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# SAY YOU WANT A REVOLUTION

**JOSHUA LUNDBERG** is on the cusp of the precipice of the bleeding edge

I've been playing PC games since I was 14, and every time I'm infected by that awful nostalgia that tells me gaming has never been as good as it was 1998-2005, the same realisation washes across me: we are on the cusp.

What cusp? THE cusp. Well, another cusp in a long line of cusps, but the most interesting cusp thus far: the freedom cusp.

People forget that when John Carmack was working on Wolfenstein that the PC was no match for the graphical computing power of consoles. Despite the range of gameplay available it was extraordinarily difficult to bring the visual breadth of machines dedicated to gaming within reach of the Personal Computer.

They forget that the cost-effective GPU is only, really, ten years old; the Accelerated Graphics Port pulled GPUs out of the comparatively slow PCI lanes at a time before PCIe, when GPUs outpaced the interface.

PC gaming has revolutionized and evolved repeatedly, and here we stand at the forefront of another revolution.

The revolutionary time we are now in defies the proclamations circa 2007-9 that PC gaming is dead; it defies the idea that a PC is for a desk and a console is for the lounge; it defies the idea that virtual reality belongs in science fiction.

It brings with it the most interesting gameplay and storytelling opportunities ever available.

It's a combination of imagination and the overwhelming power of the PC - and the great cost efficiency of it. Bang for buck is at the best ratio in the history of gaming, and Oculus Rift, SteamOS/Big Picture (and the controller and streaming they bring) Intel's RealSense and a number of other interface technologies are providing opportunities to play games wherever you like at home with wonderful immersion.

The combination of streaming technologies with Virtual Machines running on your main PC with tiny boxes at each monitor will allow you to share the power of your PC like never before; as you game

on your TV someone else can browse the Internet, watch Netflix or curate their photo album or even play another game at another monitor.

The possibilities have me more excited than any single game.

I've been using Big Picture since launch, and I've chopped and changed my setup. I've tested streaming across devices, Android, OSX, Linux, Windows 7, 8, on a netbook. The freedom it offers my in my gaming is phenomenal, and it was the missing link in a long transition from console back to PC.

As I spent a number of year as an OSX and PS3 user, I lost the temperament for sitting at a desk to play games. As I began working in the tech media in 2010, the possibilities of PC gaming outstripped anything consoles could offer. By the times those possibilities started to come into beta - namely Big Picture - I was already a loving PC gamer once more.

The ease of access of consoles is what holds PC gaming back from an audience more broad than ever before, and Valve in particular are working to eliminate the issue. The key hurdle is making the PC ubiquitous in the lounge room - even if it's a dedicated streaming receiver or HDMI micro-PC. The availability of the Xbox 360

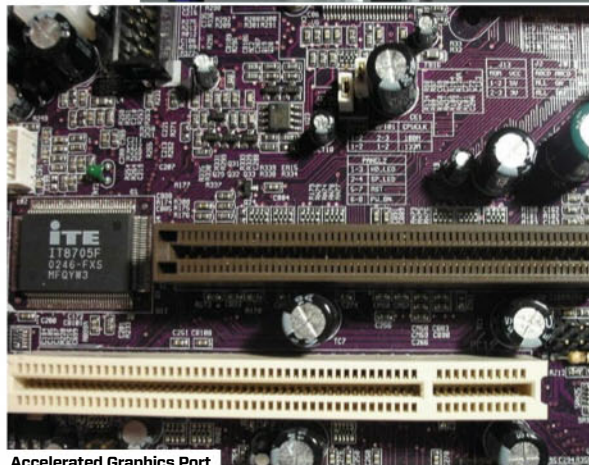
“the most interesting cusp thus far: the freedom cusp”

controller on Windows made strides into this world of opportunities, and the slow but evident push toward Linux, and in turn SteamOS, support by hardware manufacturers and game developers will help greatly. Although there is a fairly loud minority that believe the continuing monopolization of PC gaming by Steam to be a huge negative, I put it to them that they're the ones providing an opportunity for everyone; for those doubting, I've been doing tests on various GoG and other non-Steam games in Big Picture and it's working brilliantly. Those on the outside need to find streaming options and controller support desperately.

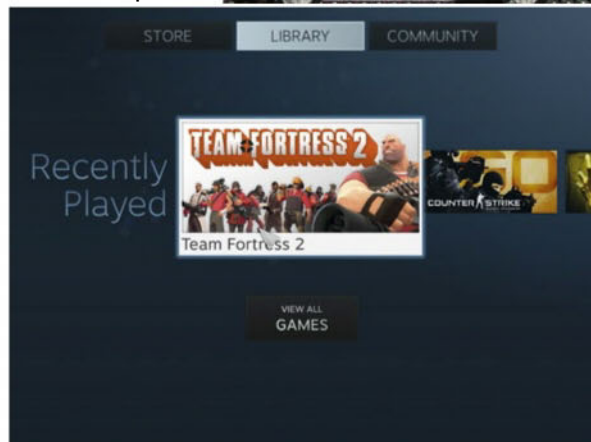
The next title I will be playing heavily through Big Picture - and testing across a range of systems - will be Grand Theft



Wolfenstein 3D



Accelerated Graphics Port



Steam's Big Picture mode



Grand Theft Auto V




Auto V. As I've refrained from going 'next-gen', my PS3 account will be pulled across for what I'm anticipating to be many, many hours of multiplayer gameplay. For me Grand Theft Auto belongs on the TV; it belongs with my surround sound and controller. That's probably because I hate playing third-person perspective games with a keyboard and mouse, but whether or not you feel the same way at least we have choices.

The key thing to take away from the discussion of future methods of PC gaming isn't the cosmetics nor is it merely a matter of interface. Where and how we play games dictates the breadth of possibility for developers; how can they utilize the input device? How can they increase immersion through the TV, Oculus or Augmented Reality device? The same can be asked of technologies like Kinect and RealSense, which could be used to read your facial expressions or monitor biometrics to change gameplay depending on how you're reacting physically to a game.

These aren't gimmicks if implemented well, and there is no shortage of talented development houses up to the task. For games that don't require such devices, but support them, we will have the choice. A freedom to absorb our gaming as though we are back with our consoles - but without the lock in or the nerfed hardware; a freedom to customise and fit our devices into our own customised 'ecosystems', rather than ones dictated by Sony, Microsoft, Valve or Nintendo.

This is an exciting time where soon, if even for a short time, things will settle down and those who are no longer satisfied by sitting at a desk and using the traditional inputs will feel totally comfortable with the way we play our games because of all the incredible new technologies.

Although gaming enthusiasts will almost always be looking toward the very hints of a new dawn, stumbling toward the horizon for the next literal game changer. It is now, more than ever, I feel that we will actually see a sunrise. 







Star Trek Armada III



# CONTINUED VOYAGES

**ALESSANDRO GUARRERA** knows StarCraft rules the roost but Star Trek owns the modding scene

Why even mod? Gaming's long history is one of modding and home-brewing, with the first videogames made by university students and government researchers who decided to use their powers for good. Whether it be the vast potential ushered in by those truly virtual-minded games like *Spacewar!* (1962), or Ralph Bayer's forays into console creation, making videogames is always an affair of passionate modification. These days, modding is easier than ever; map editors and level creators give users visual-based tools to transform their games into ambitious expressions of their vision.

Much as Space was once the final frontier, entertainment that isn't live has traditionally been a one-sided affair. Mods let players reach through the fourth wall and re-arrange the set direction.

*Starcraft* is one of many classic games designed with player customizability in mind, however players took things further than its inbuilt map editor was intended, with reskins and map packs breathing life through the game's polygonal lungs.

From the *Orcs vs Zerg* mod, to giving players a taste in anime action with *Gundam Century*, *Starcraft* has no shortage of mods. Players who tire of the vanilla game and hunger for a bit more 'opera' in their space can easily scratch this itch with *Star Trek: Dominion War*. Announced in 2007, *Dominion War* was released in 2013 after languishing in development hell, a common fate for many passion projects. Currently, *Dominion War* can be found at [moddb.com](http://moddb.com), with patches bringing it up to Alpha 1.2. Will we ever find a full release of *Dominion War*? Not likely, though considering you'd have to be a die-hard Trek or Craft fan to consider playing, that knowledge will grace and haunt you.

Not enough Star Trek? Well, there's the internet for that. No, I don't mean *that*; a slew of mods for all sorts of games can be found lurking a mouse click away, just waiting to be downloaded.

*Sins of a Solar Empire* is another stellar

title with or without Trekkie mods, but *Star Trek Armada III: A Call to Arms*, is a must have. Hosting four factions; the Borg, Klingons, Federation, and the Romulan empire. Each of the four factions has been lovingly adapted to the Iron Engine, with seemingly authentic particle and light effects, alongside resources from the Trek


Generation. Players can handle a whole slew of ships from The Klingon fleets, the Federation, and the Romulan Empire. Like in the vanilla game, maps are large, meaning intel is a vital method to win the game. This is balanced by intel probes having no warp-drives, regulating them to sub-light speeds. Ships are not the only danger, with planets themselves holding powerful defensive weapons. Using combinations of fighters and capital ships, combat quickly becomes frenetic battles to survive the void.

Fans of *Star Trek Armada I* and *II* will notice many of the sound effects were reused in *Continuum*, allowing the modders to focus more on models and effects than having to record the sound effects from the series again. Despite the game's inherent bugs with modded multiplayer, *Continuum* can be played online using a workaround described by a Gearbox software developer on their forums. This workaround can be found on *Continuum's* page, letting players easily bring the fight across the net.

*Continuum* looks gorgeous, a testament both to the strength of the Homeworld engine, and the modder's skill, letting the game run at 1920 x 1080. the mod is currently being updated to coincide for the Homeworld remaster, and can be found at Mod DB.

Finally, for the *Civilization 4* players out there, the Star Trek mod turns the *Final Frontier* mod into an adaptation of the classic series. Other modders liked the *Final Frontier* mod so

much they decided to slap a mod on the mod. This mod includes 25 civilizations, and features from *Final Frontier* like black holes, asteroids, and solar systems, while bringing back unique units, heroes, and new hazards to navigate. Players also have the opportunity to play through recreations of scenarios from the Trek universe, just to tug at the nostalgia.

The game requires players to have the *Beyond the Sword* expansion for Civ 4, and is available from [civfanatic.com's](http://civfanatic.com) forums. 



“a whole slew of ships from The Klingon fleets, the Federation, and the Romulan Empire”

universe, individual UI's for each faction, and voice clips taken from the series, all add life and meaning to this mod. The quality that's gone into building this game makes it feel more like a standalone product than a mod, especially a fanmade one.

Not to be outdone, Homeworld 2 players made the *Continuum*, an absolutely gorgeous Star Trek themed mod that spreads the action over four Star Trek properties – Enterprise, The Original Series, The Motion Picture and The Next



# THE BEST DEFENCE IS TAKING OFFENCE

**DANIEL WILKS** prefers an argument to and attack

Over the last couple of weeks there has been a storm in a teacup about some questionable tweets by John Stewart's Daily Show replacement, Trevor Noah. Trawling through the comedian's twitter history results in some rather tasteless, or at least ill-advised jokes about Jews and women. Twitter isn't a great venue for nuance or subtlety, so it's understandable that the jokes come off as blunt and none too clever, but it is a valuable resource for comics to test out bite sized chunks of new material to see if they stick. Some of the tweets being called to account (most loudly by Fox new, long term targets of The Daily Show, with headlines such as "Daily Show Disaster: How Trevor Noah Picks On the Powerless") date back to 2009. On the surface, Noah's story seems to be about people taking offence to what he has tweeted in the past, but in reality, at least to me, it seems to be a case of people going out and finding offence to use as a weapon.

Anyone can be offended by anything. That's both the power and the ultimate weakness of the concept of being offended. Everyone is different and you can be sure that there will always be someone who will take offence at even the slightest thing. That's what makes the whole concept of offending someone, especially when you're a public figure, or even a magazine person like myself. There are groups who specialise in taking offence that make it their job to use the idea that a loose word or ill-timed joke could land you in hot water, essentially using the concept of offence and the repercussions thereof to police

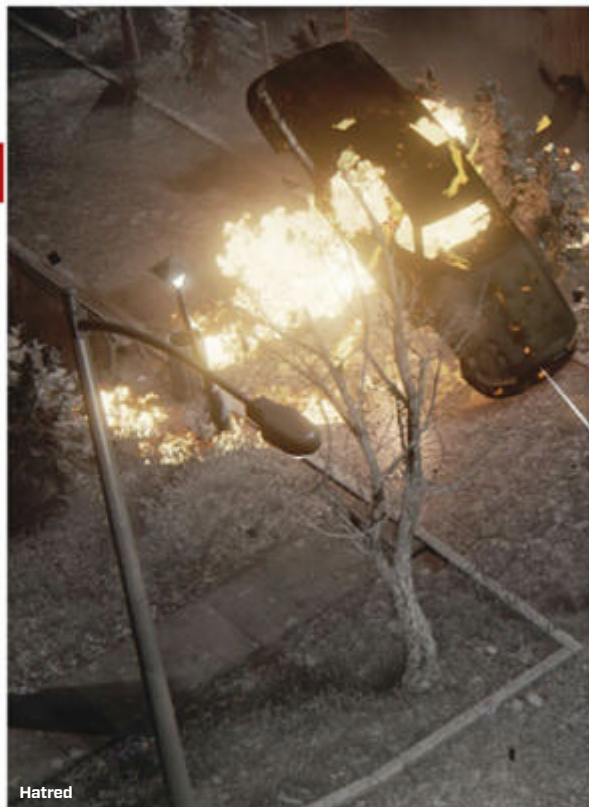
people's actions. Years ago, when I was first editing Hyper, I ran afoul of B'nai B'rith for a joke article in which I had a freelancer write press releases for a number of games we generated using the online videogame name generator. The game that got me in trouble was "Hitler Jetpack Combat". The press release for the game was a parody of far right, white-supremacist ranting and the general reaction from readers was that it was pretty damn funny, though obviously there were some who weren't too keen on the joke. The threat of repercussions to a joke that could only be found offensive if you

ignore the context and the fact that it about white supremacists rather than Jews was used as the stick to prod me into printing an apology.

A print magazine and twitter are very different things - the former allows nuance and subtlety and the latter really doesn't, but the results of offence are the same. The very concept is used as a bludgeon against anyone even remotely "guilty", even if they have to go digging to find said offence. Since the dawn of GamerGate, this has been a pretty popular tactic. Take for instance the case of Ian Miles Cheong, the editor of Gameranx and vocal opponent of GG. When he was a dumb kid he did some seriously dumb shit on forums, praising Hitler and a bunch of other crap he definitely regrets now. Because of this, any time he speaks up, his stupid mistakes are brought up to discredit him. I'm not excusing the stupidity of his remarks, but using something he said 13 years ago as a weapon, labelling the guy as a Nazi, and posting up his comments in order to reinforce the image is exactly the type of policing that the mining for offence that render the whole idea of "offence" such a ludicrous point. Everyone, no matter how pristine their internet history has said something that could be used as a weapon against them. I don't have much of a twitter presence, mostly due to the fact that I am terrible at social media, and sociability at the best of times, but all anyone need do

**“A number of people find the game offensive - that's their right”**

to discredit me is drag up this article from the past and use it as "evidence" that I am a vicious anti-semite. Someone is bound to be offended and the cycle will start again. With the willingness of people to search out and willingly find something they can take offence to, the whole concept has, at least to me, lost all meaning. As I said before, everyone finds different things offensive. Some are obvious, such as gay jokes or racist and sexist remarks, and some definitely warrant attention, but deliberately finding offence to smear someone is a problematic thing not only for the individual involved, but also because it takes away the impact of real offence. It takes the concept of individual offence and transforms it into a blanket that can cover




pretty much anything, often taking the focus of things that are truly worrying.

Take, for instance, the upcoming spree-killing game, Hatred. It's a game designed to shock and is, at least according to the developers, an equal opportunity offender, with the race and sex of NPCs randomly generated so both men and women meet their violent deaths equally. It's an easy game to take offence to, but ultimately it's no worse than a number of other violent games on the market but doesn't cover the core elements of the game with a veneer of narrative or taste. A number of people find the game offensive - that's their right - but then came the reports that the developers were neo-Nazis thanks to a simple facebook like from Destructive Creations CEO and animator for Hatred, Jaroslaw Zielinski. Zielinski liked the facebook page of the Polska Liga Obrony - the Polish Defence League - an anti-Islamic nationalist group who fear the immigration of Chechnyan refugees who they believe want to impose Sharia Law in Poland (much like our own home grown group of xenophobic idiots, Reclaim Australia), as well as a certain, lesser prejudice against the LGBT community and the favourite target of any nationalist group, the Jews. It seems like a pretty damning piece of evidence but Zielinski says that he only liked the page because they post news articles on the FB page relating to the Middle East and Europe and it was an easy way for him to have those articles brought to his attention.



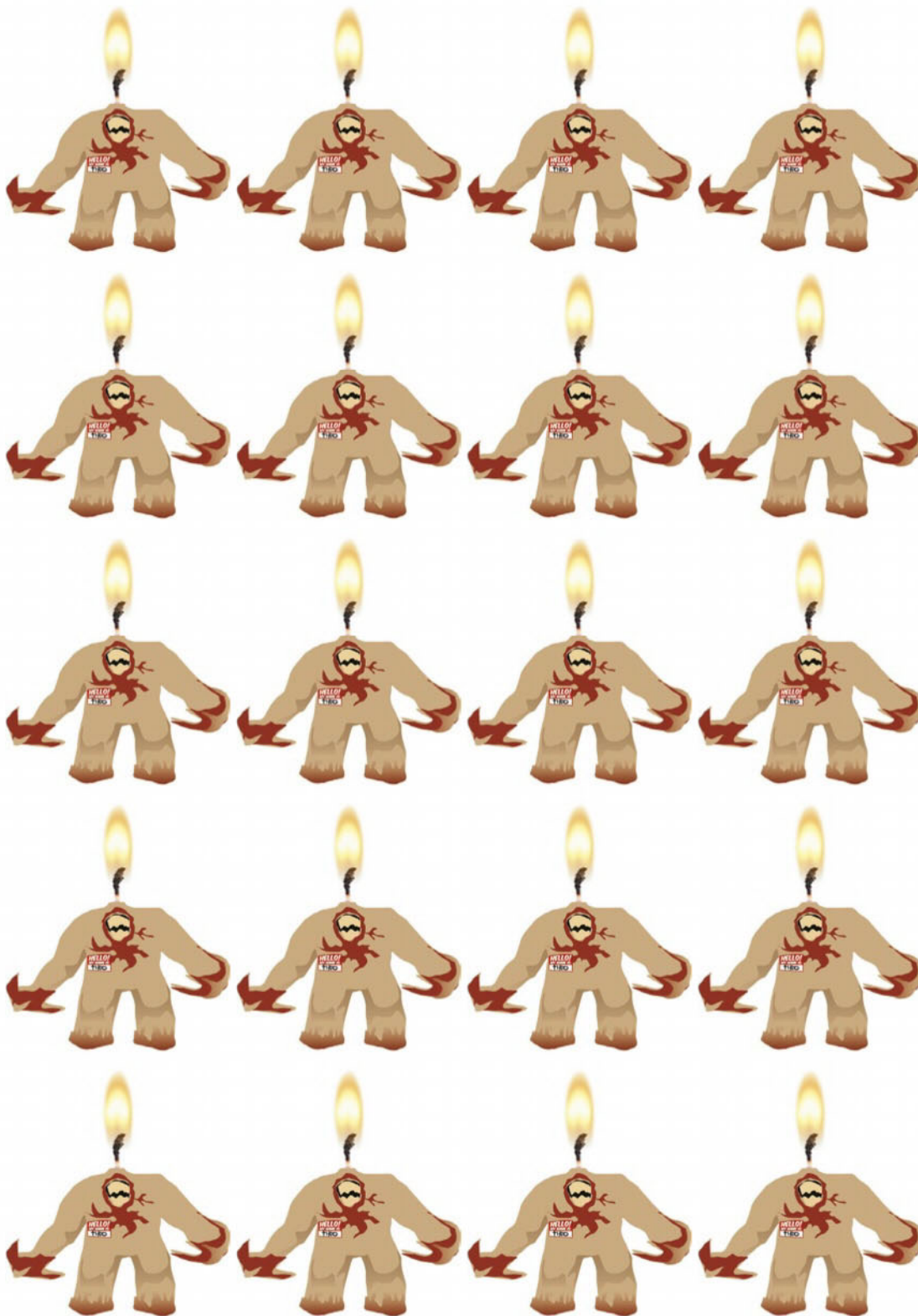


It may not necessarily be the case, but it is conceivable that a man who spends the majority of his time in front of a monitor would want condensed news brought to his attention. Even if it isn't the case, does it really matter. Being afraid of Islam isn't a particularly rare thing at the moment. Governments and media organisations around the world are drumming up scare campaigns about Sharia Law, terrorism and Islam. He could be genuinely afraid of Sharia Law. That would make him gullible and an idiot, but not a neo-Nazi. Zielinski also says that he and other members of the development team lost relatives to the Nazis and things get more muddled. Finding something "offensive" and using it as a stick to beat Destructive Creations hid something a little more worrying that was happening at the same time. After *Hatred* was restored on Steam, fans of the game started running to the comments, blaming feminists and SJWs for the game having been removed from Greenlight, despite the fact that the removal had been an internal decision. They then started clamouring for a number of high profile feminists and SJWs, including Anita Sarkeesian, Leigh Alexander, Zoe Quinn and the like, so they can presumably murder them in effigy when the game comes out. I personally find that idea far more offensive than a facebook like, but ultimately what does it matter what I find offensive. As with many things, Stephen Fry summed everything up best in his article, *I Saw Hate in a Graveyard*, published in *The Guardian UK*, June 5, 2005.

"It's now very common to hear people say, 'I'm rather offended by that.' As if that gives them certain rights. It's actually nothing more... than a whine. 'I find that offensive.' It has no meaning; it has no purpose; it has no reason to be respected as a phrase. 'I am offended by that.' Well, so fucking what." 







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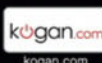
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